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DEDICATION

I DEDICATE THIS WORK TO THE CAUSE OF AFRICAN WIDOWS WHOSE UNHEARD STORIES BEAR THE TORCH TO THEIR TRUE IDENTITY.

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MEMORY INTO NARRATIVES : STORIES OF XHOSA WIDOWS IN THE EASTERN CAPE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The research has been prompted by the diversity of the Xhosa culture of mourning, which is the cause of the detriments of this rite of passage. My objective is to create ground for the evaluation of widow's experiences, their views about widowhood and the culture of mourning. It is intended as a call to the Xhosa society and intellectuals to listen to the voices of the silenced widows. It intends to serve as a witness that, as long as they are silenced, there is much that is not known about widows and widowhood. It also looks at two widows' experiences as a demonstration of a need to allow widows to narrate their personal experiences with the culture of mourning as a way of liberating them, and to let us, the others, to know who they really are. The research seeks to emphasize the importance of narrative as a tool for representing experience, to create ground for a realistic portrayal of widow characters in works of literature, and to motivate these silenced women to raise their voices against their distortion, therefore their misrepresentation. Hopefully, a debate on the culture of mourning, based on personal narratives by widows, could lead to a way of observing this culture that will be owned and upheld with pride and conviction by Xhosa women.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Widowhood is a rite of passage that many married women have to go through. Among the Xhosa people it is marked by a formal period of mourning by the surviving spouse. Xhosa culture calls for a twelve-month mourning period for women. Those who have lost

their husbands are expected to dress in black, a symbol of their widowhood, throughout their mourning period. The mourning attire is a dress or a skirt that is long enough to cover the legs. A black skirt is worn with a long-sleeved black shirt. A widow's shoulders have to be covered with a black cloak or shawl. Her shoes and socks also have to be black. The black scarf on her head has to be pulled down to just above her eyebrows. Widowers, on the other hand, need only wear a black band around the left sleeve of whatever they are wearing, or a black button.

The black attire that identifies a Xhosa widow also goes with a prescribed code of conduct. A widow has to abstain from any form of excitement; she has to speak in a low voice. To be able to observe the mourning custom, the widow should stay away from social gatherings as she might be tempted to join festivities, or be hurt by people's behaviour towards her.

The silencing nature of this ritual gags the widow. She is warned against *ukuchewuleka,* a belief that if she talks a lot, or becomes involved in an exchange of words, she might speak non-stop, even when it is unnecessary. A widow who loses weight during her mourning period is credited, *uthandwe lizila* – she has adjusted well to mourning. The demands of the mourning culture isolate the widow while her counterpart, the widower, is favourably affected. Hence he is not expected to wear any mourning attire or to behave in a particular way during his bereavement.

It is clear therefore that there is a problem with the observance of this culture.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

My interest in the study was initially spurred by personal experience. The violent death

of my husband and the inquest that followed shaped the pattern that my mourning would take. Added to this was the fact that, as a twin, Xhosa culture exempts me from the traditional observance of widowhood. This created a situation that made me realize the uniqueness of each woman's widowhood. My interest was further motivated by a response I received in August 2000, after delivering a speech at a workshop on the right of women to be supported by their husbands and partners during certain periods in their lives. The theme of my speech was that women deserve communal and individual support during their time of mourning. I read an extract from the autobiography which I had written for a Creative Writing course towards a B.A. Honours Degree. As I delivered my speech, I could see, how deeply it was touching the audience. This was confirmed by the standing ovation I received when I finished.

What opened my eyes to the situation of widows was the number of women, from the audience, who individually approached me and introduced themselves as widows. They envied my courage to talk about my experiences. Two of them, the widow of Steve Biko, Mrs Ntsikie and Mrs. Busi Mneno, suggested that we start a forum for widows to tell their stories. They confessed how therapeutic it had been for them to listen to another widow relating an experience they identified with. Although the forum has not yet been established, the venture helped me decide that widows have stories to tell that could mark the beginning of a discussion of widowhood as a rite of passage.

The suggestion of a widow's forum took me back to a newspaper report about a meeting between a South African Widow's Forum, based in Johannesburg, and Deputy President Jacob Zuma. Representatives of the forum had gone to appeal for the government's interference in what they called a violation of widows' rights. The

government was asked to help widows bring these issues into public debate to raise awareness, among South Africans, of the abuse of culture that took place in their communities (Daily Dispatch, 15 August, p. 3, 2000). I thought that if anybody should respond to this call, it is women. The call by the forum strengthened my decision to enter the debate in an area surrounded by silence.

The problems experienced by widows are universal. In 1998, the Women in Africa and The African Diaspora Conference held at Indiana University Indiana-Purdue University in Indianapolis discussed the compelling issue of widows' rights. The conference was attended by 400 people. In the words of one of the speakers, Ada Azodo, "Widows are exploited, degraded and oppressed. It's a human rights issue," (Daily Dispatch, 30 October, p. 6, 1998).

I trust that this study will prompt further responses to the Xhosa culture of mourning and that other widows will tell their stories as part of a healing mission.

1.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research has been conducted through interviews of two samples of Xhosa widows in the Eastern Cape. The choice is determined by the widows' willingness to be participants and the contrasting nature of the experiences they underwent. The circumstances of their widowhood also determined my choice. For instance, I chose a widow of violence and those widowed through illness. The interviews were conducted in a language of the narrator's choice. With Nyameka Goniwe, for instance, it seemed natural for us to speak in English, as from the first time we spoke, our conversations have been in English. A Memo 33 Voice-Recorder was used to record the interviews, which

were then transcribed in the languages in which they had been conducted. I then translated into English the one that had been conducted in Xhosa. The narratives were then analyzed, basing the analysis on a comparison of the widows' experiences, my observations of the culture, critical studies of literature on narratives, and the portrayal of widows in literature.

The widows were encouraged to tell their own stories because of the power of the personal voice. Also, because if "you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" (Kavala, Steiner. 1996:76). They need to escape from the assumption of what widowhood is about by telling what it is, from their own experiences. They have to reverse the history in which "women have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of the oppressor," in this case the custodians of the Xhosa culture. (Spivak.1995 : 28). This situation is due to the uniqueness of each experience which made it necessary not to generalize on their experiences as no two widows grieve in the same way. Their narratives are faithful accounts of personal experiences which are also representative of many Xhosa widows. They give the widows an opportunity to address the question of their identities. If the widow, like- "has no history and cannot speak, [she] is even more deeply in shadow …." (Spivak.1995 : 28).

Through their stories, each widow recreates herself after a painful experience. Their narratives can be compared to the narratives of American slaves like Frederick Douglas, Harriet Jacobs and others. Frederick Douglas escaped from his bondage and made it his mission to work for the liberation of others through the narration of his experiences in the streets of Harlem. This opened the eyes of many who fought for the emancipation of slaves. Like the narratives of the American slaves, therefore, the narratives in this

research are focused on the "authentication of the … self in a [society] that has denied that self humanity." (Barbre.1991 : 141).

My role as a researcher is to throw light upon the widow's experiences, which suggests that I have to understand their social world from their point of view. The widow, as the focal point, had to speak for herself.

> Our world is our home, a realization of subjectivity. If we want to understand man's existence, we must listen to the language of objects ----. If we want to describe a subject, we must elaborate on the scene in which the subject reveals itself (Van den Berg. 1972 : 40).

To achieve this kind of understanding I needed a face to face encounter with the participants that would enable a direct exchange and interaction in their world. In her essay, "Urban spaces, women's places", Obioma Nneameka also proposes the sharing of the subject's experiences and developing an argument based on these. She writes that speaking for and with the 'others',

> entails … figuring out how to share the site of affliction with the afflicted and as defined by them without claiming the whole territory in order to articulate it for and on behalf of them. Speaking for others (in the sense of speaking with) does not create absence and exclusion; rather it ensures presence and participation. (Nneameka. 1997 : 163).

I managed to keep the interviews focused through unstructured in-depth questions. Van Wyk,J. suggests that such questions "employ a set of themes and topics to form questions in the course of the conversations." (Van Wyk. 1996:131). Although I had specific questions to ask, this allowed me to shape some of my questions in response to the information at hand during the narrations. As Siedman reminds us, I also had to be conscious of the time, the participants' energy levels and non-verbal cues being offered. (Siedman. 1991:56-57). In accordance with this, the interview with Qondi was relaxed and over a longer period than that with Nyamie Goniwe, whom I had to see at work.

The research uses the widow's narratives as the central point of its argument. The motive is to provide the widows an opportunity to say what it means to be a widow. Its aim is to make a statement that society's perception of widowhood should not be limited to generalizations and myths, but also the true life experiences of those who have already gone through this rite of passage. A complete understanding can be reached if those who have gone through it are encouraged to speak, expressing their concerns, support or objections. Due to the silencing nature of the Xhosa culture of mourning, I had to take the initiative and together with them give a voice to the muted widows,

Gayatri Spivak is against the representation of the oppressed groups by individuals or institutions that claim the authority to do so. Her argument in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is that as long as the subordinated people speak through representatives, they are still silenced. (Spivak. 1995 : 24 -28). Nneameka, however, defends this with her theory :

> … [W]e can lend our voices to or speak up against problems facing others without necessarily speaking for them. We should aim at speaking up with them against the problems and speaking up with them for solutions without speaking against them. (Nneameka. 1997 : 163).

This explains why the widows' narratives are the center of this research – to ensure the presence of the widows while I participate in the making known of their experiences, perceptions and proposals for the future. The approach is relevant to feminist theory which is opposed to the belief that oppressed groups cannot independently interpret their own oppression and therefore choose to identify with the powerful. Feminists are also opposed to the perception that these groups cannot articulate their own standpoints. (James, J. and Sharpley-Whitling. 2001 : 184). The widows' narratives had to be put in

the center as proof that their silencing does not take away their integrity to perceive what is good or not for them, and to articulate it to those they trust.

Shakespeare expresses his belief in the therapeutic nature of expressing pain through Malcolm when he tells Macduff to talk about the sorrow of the murder of his family as pain that is not expressed overburdens the heart. The therapy of telling, therefore, depends on the response of the audience. Malcolm's willingness to listen to Macduff's sorrows is motivating and a source of hope for comfort. It was therefore necessary for this research for me to work with willing participants and to let them know why I am interested in their stories. In order to make them comfortable with opening their hearts to me, I had to explain to them that I identified with them.

The act of narrating a painful experience can be therapeutic not only to the narrator, but the audience as well. Joyce Sikhakhane who testified before the TRC, confirms this when she says her terrifying memories used to drive her to wish she could take her own life. But after sharing them with her colleagues, she realized she was not alone in her ordeal. From their stories she gathered strength to face the devastating effects of the psychological warfare that was waged by the apartheid government. (Siyaya! Issue No 3, 1998, "Women's Wounds". p. 64).

2. WIDOWHOOD AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

2.1. The State of Widowhood, as Opposed to Bereavement

It is a process whereby one adapts to profound feelings of loss. One tries to live despite the loss and being overwhelmed by grief. There is no single pattern to grief. How one deals with his or her grief depends on the individual's personality. There is therefore no value in authorative statements about how to mourn. A member of the website that helps people deal with grief has this to say about grief:

> Grief isn't tidy, is it? It isn't a neat package. It has it's own agenda and can never be just the exact same as another. We are unique and have , as I like to say, our own lenses with which we look through. Then the goal is not to try our glasses on another, but to help them through their own in a way that is meaningful to them. (On Our Own Terms, Internet).

The emphasis of grief on individuality is clear in the above statement. It also highlights the need for support based on what is best for the individual. Those close to the bereaved person have to stop looking away from pain and sorrow. They should allow the bereaved to express their pain as grieving serves to take one through a process of rehabilitation. The tug of war between communal and individual approach to experience should give way to the much needed support for the bereaved woman.

George Engels, writes :

> --- [T]he loss of a loved one is psychologically traumatic to the same extent as being severely wounded or burned. [G]rief represents a departure from the state of health and well-being, and just as healing is necessary in the psychological realm in order to bring the body back homeostatic balance, a period of time is like wise needed to return the mourner to a similar equilibrium (Worden. 1991: 9).

Worden also believes in the necessity of mourning. He describes this stage as a course

that takes time until restoration of function can take place. The process of mourning involves, "adjusting to the environment in which the deceased is missing, emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life," (Worden. 1991:10). Within these stages there are individual patterns which, "according to personality, temperament and past experiences of her will form their own pattern," (Kander. 1990:66).

Through the years Xhosa culture has transformed the culture of mourning into an oppressive period of a married woman's life. Because of the patriarchal nature of the Xhosa society, this social status has never disadvantaged men. When a man is widowed, he is not expected to mourn. It is normal to see a widower walking about, making arrangements for his wife's funeral. The authority with which he conducts himself becomes the yardstick with which his grief is measured. He uses this authority to express his love for his deceased wife. After the funeral he is given a strip of black cloth, neatly sewn, to tie around the sleeve of his jacket. He enjoys the sympathy of society, especially when he has children to care for.

Xhosa custom holds that men cannot bring up children on their own. So it is not abnormal for a widower to marry soon after his wife's death. Widowhood for women, on the other hand, is a dreaded stage of their lives. This is due to the demands of the culture of mourning that is manipulated to their disadvantage.

For the bereaved woman widowhood begins the moment she receives the news of her bereavement. Because of the transformation of the Xhosa society, there is no uniform behaviour that is prescribed as a response to her bereavement. Instead, her behaviour is determined by her level of westernization, and whether she conforms to the expectations of her own interpretation of Xhosa culture or the standards set by her in-laws.

In rural areas a reed mat is spread behind the door of the 'big hut' and this becomes the widow's seat until the day of the funeral. The mother-in-law, if still alive, keeps her company on the mat. In her absence, a senior female member of the family takes her place. In urban areas the mat is substituted by a mattress in the main bedroom. The reed mat or mattress is never left unoccupied. The funeral is delayed for up to two weeks as the family has to wait for those members who work far from home.

Xhosa culture does not allow the widow to be involved in the funeral arrangements as she cannot address people or exchange words soon after her bereavement. She may get reports or certain matters may be confirmed with her by the men who have taken charge of the arrangements. Deviation from this can only be allowed if the in-laws need access to her late husband's finances. Her relationship with her in-laws determines the manner in which the widow will observe the culture of mourning. It will depend on how conservative or enlightened her in-laws are.

The modern widow, who is educated or westernized, goes to the morgue to identify her husband's body. From the moment of her bereavement, there is a necessity for her to go from office to office, claiming money from her husband's insurance policies. She is usually accompanied by an elderly female member of her husband's family. This could be a member of her own family. Her friends can talk to her, give her the kind of support she needs and take instructions from her on how they can help her organize the funeral. If her in-laws depend on her for the funeral, she is placed in charge of everything. She chooses the coffin and has a final say in the budget.

On the day of the funeral she wears a designer outfit and a hat. She chooses some of the speakers and the picture of her husband that will be used on the cover of the program.

She writes the obituary. After the funeral she does not report to her in-laws how much the pay-outs from the insurance companies are, nor does she disclose the value of the estate. She is not obliged to share the estate with her husband's family. This is the modern widow who is uncompromising to the level of being rebellious. The challenge to her assertiveness, however, begins when the widow returns from the graveyard. The in-laws take over authority and use the opportunity to settle scores with her.

There is also the modern widow who compromises, perhaps because of her youth or for the sake of peace. It could also be that she accepts, unquestioningly, the prescriptions of her culture. A female member of her husband's family is constantly at her side, advising her on how to conduct herself during this period. She verifies her ideas and decisions with this woman. All her queries are addressed to her. Her in-laws are in charge of drawing the program for the funeral. They decide what is to be slaughtered. She has to get their approval on what to wear for the funeral, the colour of the dress and its length. Even if her dress is to be designed, the in-laws have to set the standard.

The day of the funeral is the most painful for the widow. She has to part for good with a life-partner. She has to make her good-bye to a body that will not wave back, in front of everybody. She is concerned that her children should witness the whole process, to save herself from having to explain where their dad is. The last thing, at this stage, is an in-law who pulls down her head-scarf, tightens the brooch above her breast and tells her not to lift her chin too high. What she needs is a gentle squeeze of her hand, a tight hug and gentle strokes on her back – assurances of support. These are the gestures that are more meaningful to her on this day than all the messages of hope. "When words do not come, being held or crying together speaks volumes. Do not waste these moments; they are

precious," (Kander. 1990:41). However, society is more concerned with upholding culture than with her personal healing.

When the widow returns from the graveyard, the pain becomes more intense as she realizes the reality of her widowhood. Although the place is full with people, it could look empty in her eyes as she is threatened by the imperative loneliness. This time, however, is not for licking wounds, but for observing culture. The elderly members of her husband's family, or her sisters-in-law, take her to the 'big hut' or her bedroom where she will be given the black mourning attire, different from the one she wore for the funeral. Here she is given all the lessons that will ensure that she does not disrespect her culture. She is told that she has to wear the black clothes for a specified period, the maximum being twelve months; places she should not be seen at, how she should conduct herself during the mourning period and many other restrictions that are attributed to the solemnity of the culture. Pauw :1975, as cited by Zide, reinforces this view as follows :

> ...[A] feature of Xhosa traditional custom ... is the importance of restrained behaviour during mourning. The bereaved must behave meekly, speak quietly and softly, and avoid jokes and places of amusement; and for a year there cannot be a wedding in the homestead. (Zide. 1984:109).

He goes further and explains that the Xhosa believe, "when one disregards the observance of mourning, it may lead to a loss of social status and respect in a society of which the dead are considered an integral part," (Zide. 1984:87).

Although the period for mourning a husband's death is twelve months, this is sometimes reduced to shorter periods during which the restrictions that go with the ritual are reasonably relaxed. Despite this, every mourning period is strenuous, and the black clothes are partly responsible as they become a constant reminder of the woman's loss.

The moderation of the culture of mourning takes different shapes, from radical to moderate and from conservative to modern. The choice always lies with the in-laws. Their relationship with their daughter-in-law determines their choice. If it is good, the demands of the culture might be relaxed to accommodate her working conditions or her health. For instance, a nurse at the workshop on women's rights was allowed to change into her mourning clothes only when she returned from her work. Her mourning period was reduced to three months. Also, one of the widows interviewed for the research, Qondi Mapapu, testified to the relaxation of the culture to accommodate her being a teacher for primary school children. In other cases the widow may be required to wear the mourning attire for twelve months, without it being meant to be a punishment.

In her black mourning clothes, the Xhosa widow becomes the subject of sympathy and stares from the public. She stands out in bank queues and taxi ranks. In the streets she becomes a lone figure that cannot stop and speak to friends and neighbours. Her pain goes with her. She drapes it over her shoulders and carries it with every step she takes. The clothes become a reminder at times when she wishes she could forget. They either command respect from, or instill fear in, her society. Because of the culture of silence that goes with her mourning, the widow has to bear the burden of the black clothes secretly while she puts up a brave face. It is this pain, unseen by others, that makes her wish she could mourn in a way that is therapeutic to her. What she needs is strength to accept her new status and adjust to it. The mourning clothes delay her healing process and add to her burden. While time should help her get used to her widowhood, the clothes refresh her sorrow.

Added to the torment that goes with the mourning clothes are the expectations of her

society. The widow's social life is non-existent during her mourning period. During the twelve- month mourning period the widow is monitored with a hawk's eye by her in-laws and her community. Neighbours keep check of male visitors, some of whom may be regarded as too frequent for the community's comfort. New friends might be viewed with suspicion. The culture does not allow her to visit neighbours. She does not get invitations to social events as it is understood that she cannot attend. Mrs. Mneno, who spoke to me at the workshop on the support women need from men, referred to in Chapter 1 told me how she witnessed the ostracising of a widow by the culture of mourning. She was handing out certificates at a graduation ceremony for women who had completed an empowerment course in a village outside King Williams Town. One of these women was a widow. When her name was called she stood up, remained rooted in one place and did not go up the stage to be honoured for her achievement. Another woman from the audience went up to receive the certificate on her behalf. When Mrs. Mneno enquired, she was told that the widow could not participate in a public social event while still in mourning.

Engaging in a communal project must have had a therapeutic effect for the widow. The challenges of the course must have diverted her attention from her inner suffering. Certainly, completing the course was an achievement that marked a step towards self-assertion; a demonstration that she was capable of continuing with her life despite her loss. Mrs. Mneno told of how she had witnessed the excitement on the widow's face, as her name was called, gradually change into sorrow, standing in one place holding her face between her hands. Eventually, tears of joy, perhaps of sorrow, rolled down her face. She remained standing until her representative had returned to her. When people

graduate, the way they walk across the stage, the way they carry their bodies, the expressions on their faces and their utterances, all express their joy. Is it possible then for anyone to do this on behalf of another?

In the light of the diversity mentioned above the South African Widow's forum, at a meeting with Deputy President J. Zuma, mentioned, among other things, the following:

> The clash between traditional practices and with regard to newly-widowed females and the demands of modern society – cultural practices were misused by the dead husband's families to abuse the widow, (Daily Dispatch, 15 August, p. 3, 2000).

2. 2. Benefits of Widowhood

On the other hand, there are practices that society engages in, believing they are to the benefit of the widow. These are instances when people become extra-ordinarily courteous to her or become too careful of what they say around her. As one of the participants in this research will confirm, it is difficult for the outsider to know what benefits the widow. It can therefore be argued that the benefits vary from widow to widow.

In the modern material world, widows inherit all the money that is paid out by the insurance companies, the accrued pensions and retirement annuities. Her husband's possessions belong to her, and no longer her in-laws. It is her discretion whether to share these with the in-laws or not.

The widow becomes the decision-maker. She no longer consults her now late husband for approval. She does not have anybody to report to. A widow might miss doing these and not realize they are a benefit. For example, it is now common for widows, especially with the educated in the rural areas, to buy houses in towns after the death of their husbands. Those in small towns move to cities or bigger houses. This could be to fulfill a

long desire that never got the husband's approval. It could be prompted by the desire to exploit the newly-acquired liberty by moving away from the in-laws. It is, for instance, not unusual for a widow to buy herself a car once the pay-outs have been made, or to take driving lessons if there was already a car. While the widow, and sometimes her society, may view certain actions as exploitation of the benefits of widowhood, these could be a way of getting used to her new status. They could be steps towards redefining herself.

Widowhood can bring one closer to her children. In the absence of communal support, she learns to share her problems with her children. She could regard her husband's death as a wake-up call that her own death might be imminent and start to put her priorities in the right order. Under certain circumstances, it is possible that a widow's relationship with her in-laws could be improved or damaged by the death, depending on the circumstances. A case which shows an improved relationship is that of a relative who had never been accepted as a daughter-in-law by a well-to-do family.

When her husband became paralyzed she had to leave her job and care for him. A year after her father-in-law's death, her husband also passed away. To her surprise, she was called by a bank to give her a large inheritance that had been left for her by her father-in-law. She said the money was enough to give her children the best education and change their lives forever. When she expressed her gratitude to her mother-in-law, she told her how grateful they were for the way she had cared for their son.

2. 3. Disadvantages of Widowhood

Once a husband dies, the widow's capabilities to run a home automatically cease, in the eyes of society. Suddenly, in the eyes of her society, she cannot make good decisions alone, hence her in-laws expect to be consulted whenever decisions have to be taken. Any

negative development in her home is attributed to her status as a widow. Children brought up by widows are supposed to be the instigators of violence and crime in their communities. If not, the father is credited with having laid a good foundation in their upbringing. Widows' homes are stigmatized as meeting places for boys and girls. The widow does not have to commit any of these "crimes" – she is guilty by virtue of her being a widow.

The most harmful of the treatments that a widow gets is being regarded as a threat to every marriage in her community and workplace. Suddenly, friends do not trust her with their husbands. Favours that are gentlemanly when done for others are interpreted as advances if done for her. When she has to ask neighbours for anything, it has to be via the wife.

The state of widowhood silences the woman. When men meet she is excluded, like all women, but others get reports from their husbands. When issues that concern her are discussed, she only gets a report of a ready- made decision. If she makes suggestions, she risks alienating her in-laws. When her son goes for initiation, she has to let men handle this while she remains in the dark. This is perhaps the situation in every home. At least for a married woman, the presence of a husband and father becomes a consolation. The widow, in respect of her culture, contains her curiosity. She learns to read faces and to obtain meanings beyond what she is told. When her son or daughter gets married, she is not part of the negotiations. The bride price has to be fixed by men, even if they are not family members. *Abakhozi*, the in-laws' representatives, cannot negotiate with a woman. Her presence in the negotiations would lower the dignity of the family.

The cause of death is the most pertinent part as it determines whether society should

sympathise with the widow or not. In the Xhosa culture it is unacceptable for a man to die from natural causes, or even in an accident. If he has been a hardworking person or a long-serving civil servant, therefore with a possibility of a large sum in pensions, then it might be assumed that the wife must have 'cashed him in'. The widow may be accused of having 'removed' her husband as he was a stumbling block to her assumed infidelity. This results in a tug of war between the widow and her in-laws, with the in-laws vowing that the widow will not get a cent of their son's money. The widow on the other hand holds on to her marriage certificate and other documents as they are proof of who the beneficiary is. In some cases the in-laws even express their fear that the widow might abandon their son's or brother's children.

Widowhood may thus strip the woman of her dignity. She has to fight to keep it. Suddenly, her actions and utterances may be interpreted as flirting. In society's eyes she becomes intimately involved with every frequent male visitor to her house. One of the most painful of these detriments is when the widow is at a social gathering. When she is introduced she realizes she has a new title. The events leading to her acquiring the new status are freely discussed. If they are discussed in her presence, it is in low voices.

One of the participants in the research testifies that a widow is a misfit in her own society. She is neither married, divorced nor unmarried. When husbands give protection to their wives, she has no one. When everyone goes home to a husband or a lover, she goes home to her sorrows. Long after her bereavement, society still sees her as so-and-so's widow. One way of survival for the widow is to keep the memory of her husband alive. Contrary to this, the Xhosa believe the dead should not be referred to by name, but as *umfi* – the deceased. This does more to open up her wounds than help her heal. This

kind of insensitivity is due to the fact that society assumes that once the public period of mourning is over, the widow has healed. The truth is that her invisible wound is the most dangerous.

Nomvula Bhengu summarizes the detriments of widowhood as follows:

> It was a painful realization. Overnight I had gone from being a happily married wife and mother to a widow with very few rights and privileges. I had no say, even when it came to decisions about the funeral. The only power I had was the fact that Gerald's family couldn't afford to pay for the funeral, and I could. Still, all the decisions regarding his burial were made by his family clan. It's an age-old cultural practice, but to me it is cruelty masquerading as culture. (Femina, March, 2001 : 91).

Like a prison, widowhood classifies women, maintains them in constant visibility of their society, codes their behaviour, forms around them an apparatus of observation. It becomes a penalty for the woman. Society is accorded the right to punish the widow. The difference between the two institutions is that the prison's right to punish is authorized by legislation and there is uniformity in exercising it. As Foucault points out, in a prison punishment is administered equally on all those who deserve it, but not with widows. Their punishment depends on the one administering it. (Foucault. 1997:231).

3. CRITICAL THEORY

To get out of their situation widows need to be assertive, to raise their voices and make a statement,

> not reaffirming [their] presence or actualizing [themselves] as if [they] have been absent, [they] know [they] have never left; [they] are simply, but quite radically reclaiming [their] own stories which for long have been told for [them], and have been told wrong," (Margot Badran. 2001:35).

Voices of Xhosa widows have been neglected by researchers and academics. Much has been done, politically, to protect their rights as far as inheritance is concerned, but their personal experiences with the culture of mourning have not been explored. This lack of research in this field further silences these women who are already muted by their culture.

The sacredness of the culture of mourning, to the widow and her society, compels the widow to conform to the standards set for her. Its custodians are determined to preserve it through its observance. Because the widow has a desire to belong, to be seen embracing her culture and respecting the dead, she subordinates herself to the oppressive cultural structures. In some cases the widow might display a will to stand up against these stuctures will to stand up against these structures, but their snares are everywhere. Eventually, "... the master and the slave are, locked in a compulsive struggle-unto-death. This goes on until the weak-willed slave, preferring life to liberty, accepts his subjection to the victorious master," (Gandhi. 1998:17). Needham believes that by keeping away, or suppressing the history of resistance from the oppressed people, the dominant group prevents the oppressed from resisting their oppression. (Needham. 2000:84). The same

strategy is used to create docile widows. Members of society never refer to incidents of resistance against the culture. If they do, it is to highlight the curse that befell those rare individuals who rebelled. Through the withholding of such stories, the widow is coerced into conforming to the oppressive way of observing the culture.

Like the American slaves, the story of the widows cannot end with their subordination. They need "to change from passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut," (Belenky. 1997:54). It is that inner voice that will become their strength on their way towards self-assertion and self-definition. It is the discovery of personal truth that will liberate them. The authority that guides their lives will no longer be external, from others, but from inside.

Patricia Collins forsees a big challenge in the step that widows need to take. She Expresses her concerns as follows :

> While the oppressed group's experiences may put them in a position to see things differently, their lack of control over the apparatuses that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult, (Collins : 2001).

The unity of their communities in favour of the culture of mourning, regardless of its subversion, becomes a big battle for the widows and they sometimes decide to surrender. These are women who grew up in societies where the elderly are custodians of knowledge and men are respected as heads of their homes and communities; here they are taught to win the favours of their communities by respecting their elders' words of wisdom. As adults, therefore, they develop a mistrust of their own judgment in cultural issues. (Belenky . 1997:54).

What faces the widows is not simply a rigid culture, but one that has been subverted by forces that "distort and even vulgarize the institution thereby leading to the excruciating

pain of women," (Nneameka. 1997:151). Attempts to express a different opinion or to rebel against the source of the pain become ineffective because of the formidable network around the culture. In her essay, "The Geographies of Pain", Francoise Lionnet makes the following observation regarding the position of women :

> … the women's activities as well as their thought process are controlled and policed by structures of domination that involve complex networks of power voted primarily in male characters, but at times reinforced by other females." (Lionnet. 1997: 211).

In relevance with the above statement, it is men who decide on the mourning period. If women do, it is in accordance with standards set by men. In situations where there is rivalry the culture is molded into a weapon to punish the widow. The difference between the widow's battle with her culture and other battles fought by women is that she is in it alone. She cannot form alliances with other women because none wants to be blamed for instigating resistance against the culture of mourning. Nneameka encourages these women not to be deterred in their efforts for self-determination because their critics are the "very purveyors of the bastardization of that culture whose contents remain confusing …" (Nneameka. 1997:165).

Like a prison, an institution that is necessary for the maintenance of order, the culture of mourning is necessary as it signifies parting with a loved one. It symbolizes the last respects one can pay to the deceased. But the culture that has to be observed takes the shape of a penalty because of its "deprivation of liberty. How can it not be the penalty … in a society in which liberty is a good that belongs to all in the same way and to which the individual is attached?" (Foucault. 1977:232). This explains the extent of the violation of the widow's rights. What everyone is entitled to is taken away from her.

Foucault goes on to explain that the prison locks up offenders, retains and renders them docile because it is "an apparatus for transforming individuals," into acceptable members of society. (Foucault. 1977:232). But the widow does not need to be transformed. Why then should she be confined to a specific area and rendered docile? The possibility is that the structures of authority fear her expressing her awareness of the wrongs and protesting against them. While her society wishes to transform just her, in some cases, she advocates for the transformation of her community, in the process of which she will also be transformed. By seeking to transform only the widows, the custodians of the culture of mourning render them misfits in their communities, which are not transformed.

The widow's inability to shake loose the yoke of oppression can be blamed on culture, "the root of women's problems," (Nneameka. 1997:210). In some contexts, culture operates like colonialism – it colonizes the minds of its subjects. It plays a double standard, first presenting itself as something that its subjects have to be proud of; something that they have to identify with in order to know themselves and to have a sense of belonging. On the other hand, it presents itself through the commitment of its disciples who enforce its stipulations, but in a distorted form. In the name of upholding the culture, they impose their own interests on members of their societies.

The traditional mourning clothes that the widow is made to wear are supposed to draw society's attention to her situation so that members of that society can co-operate with her in the observation of the ritual. The truth is, however, that while one sector of a society is determined to uphold the culture of mourning, there are those who see an opportunity for personal agendas. The veils worn by Islamic women, for instance, can be argued to be instruments that reveal a young woman's maturity. Males, who have been regarding her

as a child, begin to see her as a woman, and therefore a subject of victimization. (El.Guindi :1999). The same thing happens to the widow. Her mourning clothes identify her as a widow and expose her vulnerability, which is embedded in her mutation, the possibility of an inheritance and the absence of her protector – her husband. The clothes assure her victimizers that she will not talk or fight back, and her husband will certainly not retaliate to her maltreatment because he is dead.

According to Foucault and Delueze, as quoted by Spivak, "the oppressed, if given a chance, …, can speak and know their conditions." (Spivak. 1995:25). This suggests that feminists and other groups or individuals who wish to represent the oppressed women, should give them an opportunity to narrate their conditions as they know them. Once given this opportunity, they should adopt the Pan-Africanist attitude of the Negritude Movement which saw blackness as something not to be dreaded, but to be proud of. Leopold Senghor believed that, "Far from seeing one's blackness as an inferiority, one accepts it, one lays claim to it with pride, one cultivates it lovingly." (African .com: Articles : Negritude, p. 1). With this attitude women will claim their widowhood and define it in their own terms. This will give them total liberation, which is, "that which concerns all sectors of the personality." (Fanon. 1963:250).

A Xhosa widow seldom refers to her mourning period to express dissatisfaction. The few, therefore, who do speak, do so as mouthpieces for others. Their personal accounts become a united voice calling for the attention of upholders of tradition. Theirs is an attempt to reinstate the marginalized widow in the face of a dominating patriarchal society. "Black women use the personal narrative to document their differences in self-perception as well as their concerns for themselves and others, their sense of themselves

as part of a distinct …community", (The Narrative Group : 1991).

While making the choice to let the widows tell their stories, I had to be conscious of the notoriously unreliable nature of memory, the primary source of the narratives. This is because the mind voluntarily suppresses unpleasant memories which the individual does not wish to remember. It could also be that the individual refuses to face the truth. Dr. Simon Jordan, as cited by Andre Brink, reinforces the above as follows :

> The mind is like house–thoughts which the owner does not wish to display, or those that arouse painful memories, are thrust out of sight, consigned to the attic or cellar, and in forgetting, as in the storage of broken furniture, there is surely an element of will at work. (Brink. 1998:35).

In his Confessions, St. Augustine comes to the defense of memory by suggesting that what is transmitted in one's memory are not the events of one's life, but their images; and these are constructed into actual events during the narration. Memory, then, conceives that moment when the incident took place. St. Augustine goes on to describe memory as a storehouse where the past is stored and continuously combined with fresh experiences that identify with it. (Ricouer. 1994:9) The widow's memory, therefore, even if she forgets certain incidents in her life, is refreshed by similar experiences around her. Whenever a husband dies, she is reminded of her own loss; when she sees a woman in mourning, she remembers the circumstances of her own widowhood. When she narrates these, it is in terms of the sense they make to her. She does not simply "recall certain isolated events, but [is] able to form meaningful sequences and connections," (Ricoeur. 1994:9). Homi Bhabha, as quoted by Leela Gandhi, also believes the pattern of the narration is determined by the nature of the experience that is being shared. He upholds the belief that remembering, "is never an act of introspection or retrospection. It is a

painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present," (Gandhi. 1998:9).

Personal narrative skills are acquired in childhood. The activity starts with the narration of daily events, as an attempt to understand them. People talk about things they have heard or read, and personal experiences. So, narrating these becomes a

> social arena for developing framework for understanding events. Narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life, (Ochs and Capps. 2001:2).

The author believes these informal conversations glue and maintain relationships in many communities. The Xhosa culture of mourning, however, bans the widow from such communal conversations. Therefore, instead of 'gluing' her to her community, the subverted culture detaches her from it.

A narrative is not merely a record of events, but a creative interpretation of these. Also, a narrative cannot be encyclopedic. The narrator decides what is relevant and what is not. The Personal Narratives Group confirms the above as follows :

> When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing the truth. These truths don't reveal the past 'as it actually was', aspiring to standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. (The Personal Narrative Group. 1991:261).

An example of this is provided by the testimonies of victims and perpetrators who testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The victims told their stories in a desperate attempt to find the truth about their loved ones; others to expose the extent to which the apartheid government went in the violation of human rights inside and outside South Africa. There were those who testified to justify their actions or asked to be pardoned for them. These were the perpetrators who applied for amnesty. They

expected something in return. They could be set free, have their sentences cut short, or be granted amnesty. An applicant like Gcina Mkize, for instance, had to dig deep into his memory, and tried to remember even those secrets he had vowed never to divulge, in an attempt to prove that his actions had been in collaboration with the Inkatha Freedom Party top brass whom he accused of discarding them once the job was done. (South Africa : TRC., Final Report, Vol. 1, 1998).

There was Morgan who testified in the Stompie Seipei murder case. He displayed little remorse, if any, and arrogance during his testimony. His aim was not to demystify the circumstances of the young activist's death, but to exonerate himself by shifting the blame to Mrs. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. These instances serve as proof of the selective nature of memory and the awareness that exists during a process of narrating events from the past. The purpose of the narration shapes the path that the narration will take.

Despite the variety of reasons for their testimonies, they helped provide answers to a number of questions that had haunted many South Africans. So many stories had been told about systems of torturing that were used by apartheid police against political detainees and prisoners. As long as these were just reports on newspapers, informed by faceless victims who feared further detentions, there was a level of understanding of such evils. But once victims and perpetrators narrated their stories, the world understood the depth of the scars. The relatives of Sipiwo Mtimkulu who was detained, tortured, murdered and "cremated" by security policemen had this to say, "We heard, after these long years when we were in the dark, that his bones got thrown here in plastic bags, by the Boers, the people who were ruling at the time," (Siyaya! Issue No 3, p. 44).

While it is necessary in other forms of narratives, like autobiographies, for one to prove the authenticity of the narrative, with an oral narrative of a painful experience this is engraved in the tone, the emotions and facial expressions of the narrator. The widows' selection of information, therefore, could be an involuntary reaction to the painful experiences they are trying to give shape to. In an essay about 'truths', the Personal Narrative Group explores the dimension of personal truths. They believe,

> "Only by attending to the conditions which create these narratives, the forms that guide them and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative. … Therefore, rather than focus on the objective Truth, we focus on the links between women's perspectives and the truths they reveal," (Personal Narrative Group. 1991:262).

The narration of such experience can be therapeutic. A counselor who provides counseling for people dealing with grief in an internet website writes that, "What the sufferer needs most of all is simply to have their pain heard and acknowledged." (On Our Own Terms : Internet).

Collins writes that one of the oppressed group's alternative ways of creating independent consciousness and to articulate it is through specialists chosen by them. (Collins. 2001:196). But the Xhosa widow does not belong to an organization and has no specialists to choose from. The question then becomes whether it should be feminists' responsibility to articulate the widow's experiences.

Nneameka sees feminism as a pedagogy and "a philosophy of social change, a school of thought that mandates involvement, and as an ethics of fair share and live and let live; it advocates moderation and negotiation and counsels against extremes and winner-takes-all mentality." (Nneameka. 1997:163). The statement suggests that feminism should not

objectify the oppressed by speaking and making choices for them. She refers to responses to Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter (1980) to demonstrate the danger posed by individuals who claim to have insight into women's situations. She writes that, contrary to what has been claimed by critics, the novella is not about polygamy as one of the evils that oppress women, but how much men distort it to satisfy their polygamous instincts. Ramatoulaye, the central character, acknowledges polygamy's relevance to the Koran. She then decides to own and respect it, despite the flaws in its application by men. She therefore decides not to divorce her husband, but to survive within the polygamous marriage. She is not against polygamy as an institution, but the way the institution is applied.

In an interview with Eloine Salo, Professor Amina Mama sees feminism as a movement that "signals a refusal of oppression and a commitment to struggle for women's liberation from all forms of oppression..." (Mama. 2001:59). The problem with feminism, however, is that it is in some cases based on generalizations and observations which are made from outside. I find this to be the case with African women's situations which involve personal experiences with their cultures. White feminists, for instance, who come from cultures different from the diverse African cultures, cannot be the best candidates to represent African women.

Ashcroft, B et al. believe feminism addresses the issue of the "marginalized other within repressive structures of domination," (Gandhi. 1998:82-83). In the debate about whether black African women should be represented by white feminists, Nneameka takes the position of claiming the idea of feminism as African. "Feminism is an English word, but the feminist spirit and ideals are indigenous to the African environment," (Nneameka. 1997:165). Despite these claims, it is difficult to place the Xhosa widow's struggle for

her cultural liberation within the umbrella of feminism because her experiences are different from those of white women, as well as other black women who have not been widowed. Not having to go through the confinements of the Xhosa culture of mourning, white feminists have no way of sharing the same perceptions with the Xhosa widow about her culture. Lumka Funani takes the same position regarding white women's right to present papers on black women's experiences. The question was asked by an African-American woman at a conference on women in Africa and Africans in the diaspora that was held in Nigeria in 1992. Funani believes "one can only talk from experience [,] i.e. when one has lived such experiences," (Funani. 1992:63). She is skeptical of white researchers who claim to know black women's experiences.

> Collecting data, analysing it, reporting, is not the same as living it! It is an academic choice to research in black areas with the end result being [one's] academic achievement or interest- there is nothing ethically binding on them. They have a choice to withdraw which is actually what they often do when the situation gets uncomfortable or unfavourable. They can cool off and come back other time if they so wish," (Funani. 1992:63).

The choice that white women have disqualifies them as representatives of black women's experiences. Funani's call is that, since they are the ones who have lived the experiences, they should be the first ones to talk about it. "We need our space to explore our realities, first, before we can make this space available to others," (Funani. 1992:68). Funani's standpoint is shared by Melanie Walker, who tells stories from the lives of South African university women. In her essay, "Open houses and invisible guests", she states that, "[in] any research process in South Africa the race of the researcher will count in some way, shaping the interview process, what is said and what remains unsaid, and the limit of our knowing and seeing," (Walker. 1999:67).

To substantiate her argument on the limitations of different racial backgrounds in South Africa, Walker refers to her experience as a coloured researcher, (she had been classified

white by the apartheid regime). Although she came from the same city with her white colleague, they had never encountered each other at school or university, which resulted in diverse findings in their historical research. She therefore believes, "instead of yearning for a false unity, we [should] rather learn to accept that there may sometimes be no common ground," (Walker. 1999:68).

Funani's opinion is disputed by Fidela Fouche, a lecturer in the Depatment of philosophy at the University of Natal. In defense of white women, Fouche writes that white women have always acted as mouthpieces for black women, "thereby help[ing] prevent the forgetting of that experience or the delay[ing] of its accessibility to others," (Fouche. 1993:39). Ironically, Fouche's statement justifies Funani's skepticism concerning the intrusion of "others" in black women's personal experiences. The interest of the white researcher is academic and little benefits the owner of the experience. The experience has to be made accessible to others as soon as possible, so that it may be utilized in accordance with the researcher's interests. The owner does not choose the words in which her story will be narrated by the "other". Instead, she may find herself an object of discussion even before she makes sense of that experience. The fact that the researcher might respond with urgency to the widow's experiences, while she has silenced herself to comply with her culture, only serves to highlight the differences between the two.

In a country like South Africa, that has had residential areas demarcated in accordance to skin colour, where socializing across the colour line was a crime, it is almost impossible for the white feminist to understand the black widow's experiences to the level of representing her. When she does this, it is to represent her as the subjugated "Other". African women are referred to as "Third World Women", they are thus "seen as yet (other) objects of Western knowledges, simultaneously knowable and

unknowing," (Gandhi. 1998:81). This is what Spivak refers to as the disappearance of the gendered subaltern within liberal feminist discourses. (Gandhi. 1998:81). Rather than speak for her, Spivak encourages researchers to "speak to the subaltern woman, to learn from her repository of lived experiences," (Gandhi. 1998:88) She believes speaking for the 'subaltern woman' further silences her. When represented, "gendered subaltern woman disappears and we never hear her speak for herself. She is simply the medium through which competing discourses represent their claims," (Gandhi. 1998:88).

In her essay, "A Black Woman's Standpoint", Patricia Collins expresses her opposition to the idea that feminism is representative of all oppressed women. She writes that, "a subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than the group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group," (Collins. 2001:184). To substantiate her argument, she quotes black domestic workers who summed up their position by arguing that with the work they do for white women, they do not have time to think about the issues that white women think about. They think only those who have nothing to do can think about them. ((Collins. 2001:185). This reference suggests the silencing of the domestic workers by the physical demands of their jobs and the different worlds in which black and white women live.

Racial difference is not the only threat to black women's experiences, but also the distance between the researcher and her subject. Expressing her opinion on the different understandings of African feminism by 'two key thinkers', Patricia Macfadden and Gwendolyn Mikell, Professor Amina Mama confirms the limitations of the distance between the researcher and the subject. Her acceptance of Macfadden's theory is based on the fact that, as an African, she writes from experience. These are

partly informed by their different positioning vis-à-vis Africa. Patricia Macfadden is an activist and self-identified African feminist with many years of experience of political activism. Gwendolyn Mikell, on the other hand, is based in Washington D.C., and has indeed conducted research and toured in Africa, interviewed and worked with African women, presumably of her own choosing. Mikell's definition is based upon deductive generalizations and observation. She therefore describes African feminism as she sees it from a physical and analytical distance, rather than from the perspective of someone engaged in feminist activism on the African continent," (Mama. 2001:59).

If there is a possibility that the widows might be silenced by white feminists, in their advantaged position, when they speak for them, black African feminism should then be the solution. But Winnie Wanzala, her essay, "Towards an Epistemogical and Methodological Framework", sounds the following warning :

> There is a tendency even among feminists of African continent to gloss over real differences amongst African women. Many African feminists emphasize, if not seek refuge in commonality, thereby silencing the voices that do not express conventional feminist positions, (Wanzala. 1998:4).

The debate over who should represent the culturally oppressed Xhosa widows, therefore, leaves only one option open – widows to represent themselves. Funani believes there are experiences that are not negotiable, which need self-representation. "Who even among black women could claim to know the pain and trauma of other African women who get mutilated in the process of the rites of cliterodectomy? (Funani. 1992:66). As Funani claims, you have to live the most traumatic experiences of black African women to be able to talk as a representative. Widowhood, like cliterodectomy, can not be narrated by observers, but those who have been traumatized by it.

When widows tell their stories they will learn to value their knowledge about others' experiences and their standpoint in their culture. It is this knowledge about 'true

experience' and widows' opinions that they can use to resist their domination. Their stories cannot be entrusted to other women as sisterhood cannot be taken for granted. Wanzala believes "The patriarchal dimension of power overshadows power relations between women," (Wanzala. 1998:4). In the untrustworthiness of relationships between women Wanzala is in agreement with Spivak who also believes that "the relationship between women and silence can be plotted by women themselves," (Spivak. 1995:5)

Is womanism then an alternative? Yvette Abrahams makes this statement:

> [womanism] centers uncompromisingly on the construction of the self, both in the collective sense, … and in the personal sense, in that it offers a space for black women to develop a sense of full individuality in a world where our experience of self has been over-determined by external definitions of our identity which are racist and sexist," (Abrahams. 2001:71).

The definition provided by Abrahams, however, does not give womanists authority over every black woman's experience. A womanist would have to have gone through widowhood as a rite of passage to be able to represent that experience. Without that experience, everyone is an outsider.

4. ANALYSIS

The Xhosa communal life motivates people to share their experiences, good and bad. There is a strong support base among relatives, church members and colleagues. It is usually frowned upon when it is discovered that one member of this close-knit unit has been burdening him or herself with a problem. The Xhosa, especially women, have grown up in this communal life where problems are shared with aunts, uncles and friends. Ochs and Capps believe personal narratives originate from everyday storytelling where people, whenever they are together, talk about events. They talk about things, "they have heard or read, those they have experienced directly, and those they imagine," (Ochs & Capps. 2001:1). Widows' experiences and their treatment by their culture is, however, never part of this daily storytelling. Touching this taboo subject is usually regarded as being rebellious or a sign of weakness. The silencing of the widow is as influential as colonialism – it also silences the mind. Since she is prohibited from being part of any discussions or being involved in arguments, when she imagines her freedom, she silences that "still silent voice which becomes [her] inner strength.. [As a result, the] major developmental transition [that should follow] does not take place," (Belenky. 1997:54). Qondi's narrative testifies to this silencing of the mind when she relates how she suppressed the desire to go to the sea soon after her bereavement. She did not express this desire because she knew, without even trying, how it would shock her in-laws and society. She is the first to regard the wish strange. She does not put up the fight, even in her mind. Narrating her experiences during that stage of her life for this research,

therefore, becomes a stage for her to justify that desire. The research provides an opportunity for her to question those who would have objected to it. As Ochs and Capps put it, she uses her narration as an "arena for developing frameworks for understanding events." (Ochs and Capps. 2001:2). Nobody ridicules Qondi's desire, because nobody gets to know of it. She is the one who portrays, in her mind, a picture of a woman dressed in black, at the beach, and people pointing fingers at her.

The widow needs to be part of the communal storytelling activity, but her culture automatically ostracizes her. She cannot initiate the story telling because her pain is regarded as being hers alone. Also, without an audience that has an interest in her story, she is not motivated to narrate it. The widow knows that her society is not ready for her sharing her painful experiences. Evidence of this is that in the interviews the widows make no reference to a wish to share their pain with others. There is a wish to talk about the twisted way in which the culture of mourning is observed, but also not to burden others with their pain.

The widow's credibility is uppermost in her agenda. She does not wish to discredit herself by raising concerns, or complaining about, the observance of the ritual. She therefore silences herself in return for gaining this social status. The few words she is permitted to say to acquaintances and family members are not enough to express her pain or wishes and concerns. So, instead of speaking, she cries, in her privacy. Qondi is a witness to this. Her memory takes her back to a ceremony, a week after the burial of her husband, where a ritual was performed in order for the family to socialize again. Xhosa traditional beer, *umqombothi*, is brewed to be drunk on that day. She tells of her anger at the lack of consideration of her in-laws and neighbours who "entertained themselves at

the expense of my pain!" But she could not express this in words, so she stormed out of the hut where the family had gathered. Because the widow's thoughts, actions and utterances are kept in check, she does not always express herself in words. What she says, therefore, can not be classified in the same category as conversational narratives – hence she only tells it to trusted individuals.

The deprivation of the freedom of movement that goes hand-in-hand with the mutation of the widow frustrates her. When Qondi visits family friends, the Nteyis, it is not to share her painful experiences with the people who knew what she had been through. It is to honour the prescriptions of her culture, to conform to the expectations of her society. The intention is to report to them that she is going on holiday. She does this to protect her credibility. Someone has to know her whereabouts. The visit is not about sharing her excitement about the trip, but to request that they should take her to the bus station.

The Personal Narrative Group believes there is a relationship between the researcher and the subject. The shared ownership between the narrator, who tells the story, and the researcher, who records and analyses the story, has an impact on the work. It becomes an exchange of purposes for the research and the narration. "Both interpreters and narrators approach the process of creating a personal narrative with their own agendas. These, too, affect the shape of the text." (The Personal Narrative Group. 1991:202). This theory is confirmed by the fact that Nyamie agreed to the interview because she saw it as an extension of her job – helping others to overcome their painful past. It is this conviction that made her advise me to attend a session at the Center for Healing Memories in Cape Town, so that I could heal from my own experience. While I saw her as a subject for my

research, she also saw me as a subject in her own mission. She also agreed to the interview because she understood the academic importance of the research.

Qondi, on the other hand, wanted to tell her story in order to share her painful experience of widowhood. She thought if she participated in the research her voice would lift the veil over the true experiences of widowhood so that her society could see what widows feel about the culture of mourning. Qondi wished to use her narrative as a call to other widows to tell their stories. The anger in her voice, however, suggests a wish to confront her society about all the wrongs she had discovered in the ritual. She used the narrative to improve relations between herself and her brother's widow.

My purposes for the research add a third voice to the narratives. The objective of the research is to record other widows' views on the culture of mourning and to provoke a debate on the observation of the culture. I led my subjects with questions, directing the narratives in the directions of my goals. Being aware of my purposes, however, does not allow me to impose unnecessarily in the text. The Narrative Group believes this is the kind of relationship, between the narrator and the researcher, that needs to be acknowledged, otherwise being an impartial observer could lead to distortions. (The Personal Narrative Group. 1991:201). For instance, Qondi and Nyamie never regarded my interest in their experiences as mere curiosity, because I had also gone through that rite of passage. This is evident in a phrase that Nyamie uses several times during the interview, "as you know …", when she refers to certain aspects of her experience. Qondi acknowledges this when she confesses that she only agreed to the interview because I, too, am a widow. Because of this element of trust they opened up, knowing that I identified with them. The impact that trust can have on the telling of a narrative is

confirmed by Father Michael Lapsley when he describes his testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

> I had had the fortune, the privilege of telling my story many times before, but telling my story to the Truth Commission had a significance of its own… here the legitimate representatives of the new state listened to my story with reverence and respect, (Michael Lapsley. 1998:8).

This is more relevant to Qondi, who had never told her story before the interview, until she could tell it to someone she trusted.

According to the Ochs & Capps, the widows' failure to share their painful experiences is due to community members' inability, or unwillingness to take into account what happened. The evils of the culture of mourning are so accepted as part of the ritual that without them, one's mourning experience may not even need to be mentioned. Qondi's narrative bears witness to this when towards the end of the interview, she confesses that had I not been a widow, she would not have bared her soul to me, for I would have had a different perception of her experiences. She would have told her story differently. Instead of narrating her story, she would have demanded answers from the person for her suffering. This serves to demonstrate that the words the narrator chooses to use, the areas of her experience that her memory revisits and the way she portrays herself during the narration is determined by the nature of her audience. This is in agreement with Ochs and Capps' theory that painful stories cannot be told in a language that listeners understand, because the experiences they recount are outside human comprehension. The urge to tell them meets with resistance in the certainty that the audience will not understand. (Ochs & Capps. 2001: 276). The nature of the possible audience refuses her the motivation to speak and therefore relieve herself of the burden of her experience. Telling her story to

another widow, however, made her go back to her attic and retrieve memories she would have stored there, refusing to share them with an outsider..

It is clear, therefore, that the widow is also silenced by her possible audience. This in turn raises a question about the authenticity of feminist representation of her experiences. If the stories are "beyond human comprehension," except for those who lived them, what then justifies that representation? Perhaps the answer lies in Walker's theory that feminists should "learn to accept that there may sometimes be no common ground" between the widow and the feminist, (Walker. 1999:68). Xhosa widows have not adequately told their stories. Any representation, therefore, can only be based on generalizations. This suggests that their battle to claim back their voices has not yet begun. True representation will only take place once the widows become vocal about what they have been through. Their accurate portrayal in works of literature will then be relevant to their narrations. For instance, a widow character's desire to remarry soon after her husband's death will not be attributed to her low morals, but, as Qondi testifies, the fact that she may 'not have been his wife' for some time before his death. Widow characters would be portrayed alongside the lives they had lived with their late husbands, as well as what their personal interests are.

In Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter, (1980) we are able to perceive Ramatoulaye, the central character's reactions to her husband's death in relation to her life with him because she narrates it to her friend, Aissatou. Her thoughts during her forty days of mourning take us through that life, and we are able to appreciate her position to the prescriptions of her culture. This could be the situation with the portrayal of widow characters if widows could break free from the gags imposed by their culture. "One can

talk only from experience i.e when one has lived such experience," (Funani. 1992:64). A young widow in my area was pulled away from the traditional mattress a few days after her husband's death, because she was suspected of having bewitched her husband, causing his death. In another instance, a colleague left the mattress in protest when she had to share it with another woman who, at some stage, had been her late husband's customary wife. How does an outsider to these experiences begin to understand them without being taken through them by the owner? The answer is perhaps in Ngugi waThiongo's portrayal of Mugo, the central character in A Grain of Wheat, (1986). His community's understanding of him is based on heroic misconceptions. As long as he does not tell the story of how he betrayed the real hero, the community mistakes his withdrawal for politeness. In the process, he drifts further and further from them.

The unique nature of grief, and therefore the need to mourn in a way that is unique to every widow, is evident in the narratives of Qondi and Nyamie. Their experiences are shaped by the circumstances of their bereavements and their communities. Their narratives are in turn shaped by their objectives for sharing their experiences with others. Nyamie's husband was a political activist in Cradock. His, and three other activists, untimely death came at the height of the political struggle against apartheid. The gruesome murder of the 'Cradock Four' threw the country into a political turmoil, with everybody grieving the loss of their heroes. The widow, Nyamie, was expected to take over from her husband as a vocal activist. She had to take a stand against the system that cut short her husband's political role in the liberation struggle. Her way of grieving was mapped out for her by her political community's expectations. It was with this angry tone and understanding that she responded to her loss. In the interview she says, "I was so

active. I had to be in the forefront. I had to be involved in a number of things, trying to find out what had happened at the time and dealing with journalists. So there wasn't that space to mourn." Her reference to the lack of space to mourn highlights the difference between the owner of the experience and others. For her politically charged community she was the 'ideal' widow, but personally she yearned to mourn in a way that would be meaningful to her.

The circumstances of Nyamie's bereavement suggest that the people who had gathered at her home and the thousands who attended the funeral were there to grieve their own loss and to witness the emergence of a new leader. She did not disappoint them, but rose to the moment. As a result she looks back at that moment with satisfaction. With a smile on her face she says, "there was a sense of pride in me, that if Matthew were to open up, I mean, if he could wake suddenly and see the world there, he would have been proud of me." It is because of such circumstances that when she looks back she thinks, "… that made me shift a little bit, … and tell myself, maybe he had to die to take us where we are today." This suggests that when she looks at the political development in South Africa she finds consolation – everybody understands that the freedom of the country was bought with her husband's blood. This results in the confident and calm manner she conducts herself during the interview. There is no trace of anger in her voice. Instead, it's a voice that has matured with her experience and the status she has in political circles.

Qondi's narrative on the other hand, is characterized by anger, regret and disappointment. Her husband was not a 'celebrity', but a senior civil servant. For some time he had been in and out of hospital. Their marriage had been dysfunctional and she had been ill-treated by her husband. At the time of the interview she had been a widow

for less than two years. As a result of these circumstances she seems to be using her narrative as a platform, perhaps unconsciously, to negotiate her actual response to her loss and to give a voice to other widows who are still silent about their experiences. She moved "from passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut," (Belenky. 1997:27).

Even before the d ay of the interview, when I met Qondi to explain to her what the interview was all about, there was undisguised anger and hatred in her voice. She was angry at herself for not escaping widowhood while she still had time, by divorcing her husband. She hated that she had chained herself to widowhood, which she regards as "an enemy that follows married women around, waiting for the right time to strike." In a few minutes she had summarized her life story since widowhood. She told me of how sorry she felt for young married couples, how she had wanted to take her own life and how determined she was to look after her son's welfare. Once she was comfortable with the purposes of the interview and started talking, it seemed there would be no way to stop her. It was like she wanted to take everything off her chest at that very moment. However, I had to stop her as the interview had to be recorded.

When we contrast Nyamie and Qondi's relationships with their communities, we see the negative effects that culture may have on the lives of women. Nyamie has a healthy relationship with the community of Lingelihle, Cradock, because culture was not imposed on her when she was widowed. As a result, she feels she owes them something. Because of the support they had given her, when they remembered their collective experiences with the apartheid government, she felt obliged to share with them her strategies for coping with such experience, so that they could also heal. She takes the

center stage without any qualms about her perceptions, and retells the story of her husband's death, not as a personal loss of a friend, a husband and a father. She does this because the same community had "glued" her to them when they grieved with her and were ready to listen to her speak.

On the other hand, in Qondi's case it has been her loss from the beginning in the sense that she is the one everybody wanted to see how she would mourn. The sisters who are supposed to be joining forces with her against the evils they had already experienced with the culture of mourning, instead encouraged her to conform. When she cannot stand the black clothes she has to wear for the funeral they tell her it is the only way she could express her sorrow – for others to see. None of them arms her with the wisdom of dealing with her pain. We know this because the message that is embedded in Qondi's memory, is how honourable it was to be submissive. She had seen her brother's wife observing the culture in silence, and in her role as sister-in-law, expecting her to conform. The widows she had called for were not there to take her hand through the loss, but to tell her how she could help others through their loss of a son and a brother. What they told her was confirmed by the woman she met at Shoprite, who reminded her that she was one of the temptations she had been warned of. This is a woman who, if sisterhood were to be taken for granted, would defy that warning by making herself a blessing in Qondi's life as a widow, rather than being a curse. Instead she chose to join other women in plotting the relationship between Qondi and her silencing culture, (Spivak. 1989:5).

Sisters are people that one is supposed to confide in. They do not have the authority of brothers who are already practicing to be authorative fathers. In the Xhosa culture young men even take prospective wives to their sisters for approval. In the absence of parents,

sisters play their role and are therefore entrusted with the lives of their siblings. When it comes to widows, however, this cannot be taken for granted. Patriarchal dimensions overpower this supposed relationship. Xhosa women always consult men, regardless of their age, with regard to how, and how long the widow will mourn. When women say, *"Thina aph'emaZangweni*, this is how we do it," they are not referring to the Zangwa clan as inclusive of women, but comprised of men only. They therefore become instruments to make other women, the widows, honour the patriarchal rituals of the Zangwa clan. The woman at Shoprite does not see the widow in the context of her loss, burdened by the stigma of her mourning clothes, but a woman liberated by her financial inheritance. In the woman's mind, Qondi does not deserve sisterly support, but is expected to play the role of a benefactor who bails out those who have not been widowed yet. Unlike Qondi, the woman had freedom of expression and she used it, unfortunately, to hurt a "sister". Through her choice of words we are able to determine how some members of society perceive the widow's situation. How can the widow, then, narrate her experiences to such 'sisters'? How can such 'sisters' claim the right to represent her?

The advice that the widows gave Qondi when she called for their support after her bereavement does not dismiss sisterhood among widowed women. Instead, it confirms women's indoctrination by restrictions of their culture and how much they are willing to embrace it. Qondi's requesting their presence and their compliance points out to the existence of sisterhood among them. Even the elderly woman who had been her neighbour and thought Qordi's widowhood was God's way of relieving her from the bad treatment she had received from her husband, she said it out of sympathy. Although Qondi says she hated the implication that she was going to be happy after her husband's

death, later in her narrative she agreed with the woman by confessing that, "When I think of it now I realize that I'm happy that Simon is dead."

The existence of sisterhood between Qondi and her sister-in-law is evident in Qondi's regrets in the way she had treated her. As suggested by Funani, it took Qondi being a widow to be a real sister to another widow, because one has to live an experience before she can claim to know it, (Funani. 1992:63). Qondi confirms this when she says, " …it comes back painfully when I realize that the poor child had to go through this. …I realize that there must be many, many things that we did which did not make her happy, which I was not aware of. It's only now, that I've realized that certain things we thought made her happy did not." Her own widowhood forced her to look back to that time and uses the narrative to make her regrets known. She discovered that she could not do things right then because she had lacked the personal experience of being a widow. Now that her turn had come to go through that experience, she wished she could have done things differently. Her message, therefore, is that it is those who have gone through widowhood who have to guide other widows on how to observe the culture of mourning.

In the process of "re-membering' pieces of her life, Qondi narrates what she remembers from what her supposed sisters said to her since her bereavement. Because remembering is "a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present," Qondi is still battling to make sense of what they said, (Gandhi. 1998:9) She is still trying to make sense of it. In her eyes, the only unity that these "sisters" have shown is between themselves, without her. They pledge solidarity in the sustenance of their marriages when they reprimand each other that it is time to go home, or they would have to account to their husbands, while Qondi has nobody to make explanations to. Qondi

might not figure out how these women could be so insensitive, but it is certain that she has a penalty to pay for the loss of her husband. It is beyond her imagination that her friends, the only people in whose company she could be herself, could hurt her like that. Wanzala's theory that "sisterhood cannot be taken for granted" makes us understand such utterances, (Wanzala. 1998:4). Qondi was given a whipping in the city center, in broad daylight, but nobody came to her rescue. The same happened when she was humiliated by three young men who wanted her to prepare them a meal. Not a single woman raised her voice in her defense, despite the knowledge that as a widow she could not take up that challenge. Instead of family and friends, she experiences unexpected sisterhood from her colleagues. They take turns providing her with "security" whenever she is to be in a public place. They protect her from the same community she is supposed to be a member of. She testifies to this when she says it was unfortunate for her that none of her colleagues were with her on that day. This kind of "sisterhood" should not be taken for granted, because it is rare. The unique nature of Qondi's experience disqualifies any prospective representatives, and makes her the its owner and therefore the only narrator.

The double standards of culture, as cited by Gandhi, are clearly demonstrated in the widows' narratives. They both express the necessity of, and identification with, the culture of mourning. They know the consequences of denouncing the culture. With the level of westernization of many blacks, they are careful not to present themselves as having abandoned their culture in favour of a foreign one. This would weaken their case and lower their status in the eyes of their societies. An example of this is Qondi's family that made her brother's wife to mourn in a way that the society would approve, so that they would not lose their credibility. This is how they have been brought up to make

certain that they never get lost, culturally, and to give them roots – something to be proud of. The confession of the necessity to mourn is therefore based on the philosophy that culture is unifying; it provides one with identity and a sense of belonging. The same embracing culture, however, also rejects widows by ostracizing and silencing them.

Nyamie did not mourn in the traditional way. It was not in defiance of the culture, but the ritual was outweighed by the political aspirations of the time. The culture could not silence her. Like the death of any soldier, grief is expressed through a continuation with the war in which the soldier had fallen, and she did exactly that. But now, sixteen years later, the political tone has changed, the war is over, and she needs to go back to her roots, she needs to identify with her society and maintain her status. She therefore expresses regret for not mourning in the traditional way. She emphasizes the necessity to observe the ritual because of its value. Nyamie knows that she will lose her status in her society, especially in the New South Africa, where traditional cultures are revived and acknowledged, if she denounces the culture. She is also an enlightened woman who is aware of, and respects, human rights. She therefore mediates a way between the upholding of the culture and the recognition of women's rights. She proposes that women should be allowed to mourn in a way that suits them and to wear colours of their choice.

Although Qondi's circumstances of bereavement and method of mourning were different from Nyamie's, their agendas are identical. Despite Qondi's conflicting statements about her feelings on her husband's death, it is certain that she felt relief that Simon was dead. She may have been confused about how she felt, but it is not doubtful that she is happy that her son's life is guaranteed of peace, free from being tormented by the pain of being used to hurt his mother. Contrary to this "freedom", Qondi is expected

to mourn and grieve, instead of celebrating. She had been aware of this expectation and had prepared a black dress to wear for the funeral – a dress that later haunted her to tears. Her three- month mourning period was so long that she could not wait to inform her in-laws that it was over. Yet Qondi is in favour of the continuation of the culture of mourning, so that she may not discredit herself to her society.

On behalf of other widows, Qondi and Nyamie express their respect for the culture of mourning, but demand the acknowledgement of the widow's right to mourn in a way that is therapeutic to her. Qondi says, "I wish people could understand that mourning is in you, and not what you wear. … I think one should be allowed to do it in the way she finds suitable for her. It should be understood that one does things in a particular way because of the way she thinks, The way she feels." Nyamie is a model of what Qondi is proposing – a widow who mourned in a way that was meaningful to her. With the understanding that her husband was a hero, she mourned like a political hero's widow, making speeches, addressing the media and dressed in the green, black and gold colours of the African National Congress for the funeral. This is what she remembers with pride. Yes, she wished she could have time to attend to her pain, but her political commitment was stronger than her personal grief. The comfort she experienced with the culture gives her the courage to confront her society and demand the liberation of other widows. In agreement with Qondi, she says, "That's the pity with this, … with it. When you are observing the culture of mourning, you have to do it for yourself. But with … in our case you don't. You don't because it has been prescribed for you." She follows this statement with a long sigh, as though she could feel the burden on her shoulders. Perhaps their point is that there is nothing wrong with the culture, but its custodians.

Expressing her point of view on Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter, Nneameka writes that the problem is not polygamy, but "the polygamous instincts of men," (Nneameka. 1997: 152). With the Xhosa culture of mourning, however, the problem starts with the culture itself. Its custodians make worse a situation that is already in violation of human rights. For instance, refusing the widow the right to speak is synonymous with the culture of mourning. One may observe the culture to the last of its imposed prescriptions, but fail to regulate her verbal communications, and everything becomes null and void. A widow who "talks a lot", even if just to family members, erases whatever credit she might have accumulated in her favour. In my childhood, and in adult life, I have seen women tiptoeing out of church halls before the services were over – to avoid the excitement of the small talk after the service.

The voices of the two widows, Qondi and Nyamie, are representative of other widows. Even though Nyamie did not go through the mourning ritual, being a widow and her acknowledgement of a wish to "claim the space around me, myself, to grieve," gives her the right to speak on behalf of other widows. Her not going through the ritual provides evidence to the reality that each bereavement has circumstances that determine how the widow will mourn. Nyamie confirms this when she says, "I didn't. It didn't require me to go through the culture of mourning because, as you know, it was an unnatural death." Her reasoning is based on the Xhosa belief that when the death is due to unnatural causes, the family is exempted from observing the culture. But a Xhosa woman grows up with the culture and witnesses its observance by members of her community. So, despite her exemption, Nyamie is able to acknowledge the value of the culture. "[Y]ou only realize

that value when you don't grieve. Then you feel there's something missing." With these words Nyamie declares her identity with the culture of mourning.

Culture is, by nature, unifying. Embracing it gives one a positive self-identity. But the way the Xhosa observe the mourning ritual cuts the widow from her society. Ochs & Capps' theory on narratives tells us that personal narratives are told to make sense of daily activities and experiences. "Narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life," (Ochs & Capps. 2001:2). This points to the paradox of life as a widow. While embracing the culture, it is rejecting her. The society that is supposed to collaborate with her attempts to understand her daily experiences through the narrative activity, instead isolates her If she, in turn, rejects the culture, she is ostracized.

The Xhosa know the importance of the narrative activity. When an initiate has been in the bush for a week, on the seventh day there is *ukojisa*, a ceremony that marks *ikhankatha's* satisfaction with his healing process. After this ceremony the initiate is free to visit other initiates or to be visited, so that they can make meaning of their coming to manhood. The initiate, though isolated in the forest, is allowed contact with others of his kind and a selected member of his community in whom he can confide. *Ikhankatha* supervises the healing process of the initiate and becomes a link between him and his family. In his absence *amanqalathi*, boys who are still too young to be initiates, keep the initiate company and run errands for him. The network of help is efficiently planned to make this rite of passage tolerable for the initiate. But the widow stands all by herself, with the chain of communication broken by her forced silence. In her case, the need for communicating is disregarded. Nothing is put in place to support her. She gets into this

stage of her life knowing that she will have to keep her experiences to herself. She gets used to having no audience and not being heard. The only network around her is organized to supervise her adherence to the prescriptions of the mourning ritual.

The experiences of Qondi and Nyamie, though both based on their experiences as widows, have different tones. Nyamie is calm and at peace with herself and her society. There is authority and assertiveness in her voice. The tone of Qondi's narrative, on the other hand, is characterized by sadness, anger, laments and confusion about her feelings. Her sadness partly emanates from her failure to stand up to the custodians of her culture. Qondi has not moved from external to internal authority. In relevance with Hegel's theory of mutuality, "in which the self subordinates itself to another," Qondi conformed to the standards set by her society and she is angry, (cited in Gandhi. 1998:16). Because she had been silenced, there is a desire in her to make the same public addresses that Nyamie made when her husband died. Her anger is not much about the loss of a husband than the culture that forced her to sacrifice her self-interests, the person she is and made her lie about her true feelings. "To speak in the desired way is, to also learn to speak against oneself, and this is what frustrated Qondi, (Gandhi. 1998:13). In agreement with the theory that human beings have a need to talk about daily happenings, find answers to questions and to check their opinions against others', (Ochs & Capps. 2001:67). Qondi also had a desire to talk to somebody she trusts about her experiences. The questions she could not ask about her mourning were still issues she wanted to address.

Qondi and Nyamie's narratives serve to negate the theory which claims that the oppressed cannot independently identify their oppression and therefore choose to identify with the powerful, (James and Sharpley. 2001:85). The theory, in fact, is an example of

the generalization that others make about the situations of the oppressed. If this should go unchallenged, it would lead to a misrepresentation of the widows. The points raised by the widows against the observation of the culture of mourning and how it affected them testifies against the theory. Qondi's realization that she had misunderstood the circumstances of her sister-in-law's widowhood and had therefore treated her inappropriately, suggest an interpretation of her situation. Her regrets indicate a different perception of the situation of widowhood, and are based on her own experiences. In her narrative there is no suggestion of her choosing to identify with the oppressive in-laws. In fact, making up with her late brother's wife suggests she does not want to be seen as in the same league with the oppressive custodians of her culture. Although it is years since her brother's death, she feels it necessary to correct her misinformed actions. What she corrects is what she wishes had been corrected in her treatment by her society.

A week after her husband's funeral Qondi's in-laws had a customary washing of spades ceremony. Qondi could interpret her oppression when she was made to sit on a reed mat and watch her in-laws and neighbours enjoying the traditional beer they were drinking. She questioned the excitement at her expense. To demonstrate her disapproval, she stormed out of that hut. It is true that Xhosa widows do not articulate their standpoint, but it is not due to a failure to interpret their oppression. Xhosa women grow up watching submissive widows observing the culture and become indoctrinated with the belief that it is honourable to go through the ritual in silence. When one's turn comes, therefore, one wishes to do it like all the other widows. Also, in the African culture marriage of two individuals also brings the two families together. Rebellious behaviour by the widow, therefore, could spoil this relationship. This in turn blackmails her into being submissive.

Neameka, however, is of the opinion that, "the victim's silence is also a voice, we must learn to listen to the silences of the silenced "victims' in order to direct our discourses," (Neameka. 1997:151). Society, however, fails to allow them the space to voice their true feelings.

The fact that the two widows speak in favour of the observance of the culture of mourning, but against the forceful way in which it is imposed on widows, suggests their capability to analyze and interpret situations and deciding what needs to be kept or discarded in the culture. Despite the capability to identify oppressive elements of their culture, "their lack of control over the apparatuses of society that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult," (James & Sharpley-Whiting. 2001:85). This theory suggests the powerlessness of widows. The sacredness of the culture, the formidable network of the "supervisors", the widows' wish to belong to their societies and the lack of trust of members of their societies, all render the widows mute. They have nobody to whom to express their standpoint, people who could be their allies in their quest for freedom and understanding of events in their new lives. Qondi's narrative is an example of this. She is very articulate and must have been frustrated by the silence that was imposed on her. Her narrative also demonstrates how observant she was of her treatment. It is also clear that Qondi's experience with widowhood did not begin with the death of her husband. When her brother passed away she was already aware of the mistreatment of widows, hence the wish to relax the observance of the mourning ritual by her sister-in-law. She believed she had fulfilled this wish, until her own widowhood. By the time her turn came, she already knew what to look out for. She remembers that when her in-laws came to her house after her

bereavement they did not lay down any rules on how she had to conduct herself. This was against her expectations, and she knew how she would have handled them, had they dared to tread that ground. But when the time came for her to put down her foot she did not, instead she quietly accepted the black mourning clothes and three-month mourning period. This was despite her belief that, for her, it was time to celebrate. When the in-laws shared jokes and laughed happily during the washing of the spades ceremony, she was hurt and angry, but could not express it in words. She refrained from objecting to their behaviour because she knew nobody would listen to her. Her utterances, rather than being considered, would have been regarded as a violation of the silencing order of the ritual. Without an interested audience, knowing that her utterances would not serve their purpose, Qondi chose to silence herself. Knowing that even her own mother would not advise her to defy the culture, she did not even bother to open her heart to her.

Despite the silencing techniques of the Xhosa culture of mourning, Foucault and Deleuze advocate that this, "silenced, the silenced center, if given the chance, … can speak and know their conditions," (Spivak. 1988:25). Allowing the silenced widow to speak would open a new level of understanding of her situation which has been taken for granted by her society. Her voice will call attention to her reality so that it may be seen as an aspect of her culture that needs to be reconsidered. The task of transforming the culture of mourning has to be piloted by the owners of that experience. There is a need for them to mediate between widowhood as a concept of their culture and its practice. In his essay, "Colonial Criticism", Chinua Achebe encourages owners of experiences to speak, or they have no right to complain. "A man who does not lick his lips, can he blame the harmattan for drying them?" (Achebe. 1988:61).

To demonstrate that the call for a change in the observation of the culture of mourning is not selfish on her part, Qondi expresses her regret for the way she had treated her brother's widow. It is the stigma that is associated with widowhood that makes Qondi to strongly feel the necessity for change. In her narrative she expresses her frustration with this. "As a result, when I speak of myself, when I speak of widows … are misfits. You belong nowhere! I think you can't belong fully to married women, you can't belong fully to divorced women, you can't belong fully to those unmarried. You are just a person!" Her perception of herself as a widow in her society applies to every widow. Her perception also identifies a need for widows to assert themselves.

In their journey to regain their self-identity, widows may prefer to present themselves as rebels. (The Narrative Group. 1991:192). We see evidence of this in Qondi's narrative. She takes us to an incident in front of the King William"s Town post office, a place that is always teeming with people. She had reversed into a bakkie that transports furniture. The male occupants of the bakkie sympathized with her in a way that, according to her, said she couldn't have done otherwise, not with her 'recent' painful experience. In her mind they were telling her she shouldn't have been driving. At that point she violated her restrictions and gave the men a piece of her mind. "And I did things, shouting. You can imagine! A widow is not supposed to be involved in shouting scenes. But I'm a human being. I've got to (shout) when something makes me angry." The statement here is that if things come to a push, she will protect her rights, regardless of her being a widow who is still mourning. She decides not to be a humble widow, but an assertive one. The statement, "And I did things," points to the very marginality of widows. The "things" she is referring to could be regarded as normal behaviour for a woman who is not widowed.

For her, however that was unacceptable, and she acknowledges this. Awareness of this factor made her defensive.

The widows who participated in the research used their narratives to justify their actions. They reason with those who judged them. The statement that culturally, Nyamie did not have to mourn, is made without any feelings of guilt. But Nyamie goes on to put the record straight – personally, she wanted to mourn, and she misses the value of mourning. Qondi, on the other hand, sounds like she is making a plea to her late brother to forgive her for neglecting his wish that his wife should never be made to mourn in the traditional way. She says the violation of this promise was due to her lack of personal experience with the pain that goes with the observance of the ritual. Qondi's admission is proof of the inappropriateness of Fouche's claim that, "by analogy, people can gain access to the experience of [others]," (Fouche. 1993:41). The truth is, until you have lived the experience, we "have to question the meaning of [your] knowing," (Funani. 1992:64). The louder message however, is to the in-laws. Their experiences have taught them that what the in-laws dictate does not help with the healing process. Qondi uses her poor health to justify what could have been regarded as rebellious – reminding her in-laws that her mourning period was over. She also uses the innocence of her learners to appeal to her society that one's working conditions have to be considered when dictating her method of mourning. The learners, on the other hand, are living proof that black children grow up with the culture of mourning, and begin to embrace it at an early age. They are witnesses of how the ritual has been distorted, with the mourning attire varying from black to blue, green and purple. German prints, which are traditionally worn on a daily

basis around the home, have lately joined the variety of attires used for mourning. A family may quote religious beliefs as a reason for their choice of colour.

Qondi narrates unpleasant memories of her married life as a challenge for her community to understand why she was supposed to have mourned differently. She tells of how she had regarded herself as a widow long before her husband's death. When her society expected her to mourn, for her it was time to rejoice. This, again, points to the uniqueness of each bereavement, and therefore the way to mourn.

Salman Rusdie expresses the following view about the shape of an oral narrative :

> [l]istening to this man (a famous storyteller in Baroda) reminded me of the shape of the oral narrative. It's not linear. An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story, it goes in spirals or in loops. It so very often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again, sometimes summarizes itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the storyteller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust the narrative ..." (Rushdie. 1981:183).

Relevant to the above technique of story telling, Qondi's narrative is characterized by stories within the story, things she remembers in the middle of her narration and despite the questions that are supposed to guide her, it is not linear. This highlights her anger and suggests that she has not yet made sense of her experiences. She addresses each issue in accordance with how much it is still troubling her. When she is asked to respond to the negative connotation of the word *umhlolokazi*, a widow, she explains the stigma that goes with the 'label'. In the middle of the explanation she diverts to something she had just remembered, as an attempt to drive a point home. She leaves her explanation and narrates how she was frustrated by the fact that she could not go to the sea while still in mourning. Then she went back to the disadvantages of widowhood. Things keep coming to her memory as she narrates her story. For instance, her reference to the elderly woman who

saw the hand of God in her husband's death came in the middle of an explanation of how widowhood robs one of her social status. Her narrative digresses into an expression of how she was amazed and disappointed by people who thought she would be happy after her husband's death.

In the three-month mourning period so much had happened in Qondi's life and she wanted to cram it into the three-hour narrative. The result is a number of stories within the main story. The story of the men into whose bakkie she had reversed is an example of this. When she remembered the incident of the lady she had met at Shoprite she went on and told that story, in more detail than she did with the incident when her son was sent to a shebeen by her husband. The detail with which she narrates the incident signifies how hurt and disappointed she had been that another woman could be so insensitive. She was shocked by the discovery of how people perceived the life of a widow. During the interview she relived every experience she narrated, and thus made her an interesting subject for the research. At some stage in the interview she said, "Sometimes people show sympathy that makes you ask - What's this?" Then she looked at me as though she expected me to respond.

Although Nyamie's response to the questions I asked were professional, confining herself to what was asked, she also had moments when she would go back to incidents that perhaps came back strongly to her memory. This happened when she was supposed to narrate how she had coped on the day of the funeral. She started by explaining how she could not read, but ended up talking, with pride, about the 'world' that had attended the funeral and how Matthew would have been proud of her. There is no doubt that she had loved that moment and it is foregrounded in her memory of the funeral.

The question of truth in personal narratives is a subject that the Personal Narrative Group addresses with passion. Luisa Passerini writes, "All autobiographical memory is true. It is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose," (Passerini. 1991:261). The group argues that what the narrator does is to give us 'the truth of our experiences'.

> Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world that informs them." (Passerini. 1991:261).

True to the above theory, the political world that informs Nyamie's narrative is different from the traditional one that shapes Qondi's. Their experiences, therefore cannot be measured by a generalized truth, nor can the be imagined, as claimed by Fouche, (1993). When Nyamie explains how she survived her husband's funeral and says, "Part of me was floating," for her that is full of meaning. It is for the interpreter to make sense of the statement, based on its context and the purpose for which it was made. Her narrative reveals a means of survival that none of the mourners could have imagined.

The different explanations given by Qondi regarding her response to her bereavement may sound confusing and far from being true, but they are the reality of her experiences. The circumstances of her widowhood are unique. Her society expected her to mourn with dignity and, as the other widows advised her, in a way which showed that she cared. She had to do this for a man who had ill-treated her, used their son to torture her and, worst of all, no longer shared his bed with her. All this had to be done by a woman who had seen herself as a widow even before the death, for a man who no longer loved or respected her. Because the dead are always treated with respect, Qondi could not tell her in-laws the true facts of her marriage. While she contained this, the battle of how she felt about

the death continued inside her. It is in this context that she expresses the different versions of her feelings. In a case like Qondi's, what could an outsider imagine? Which part of her experience would have to be made accessible to others, before it is forgotten. It cannot be taken for granted that the cause of Qondi's pain is her loss of her husband, because she herself is still trying to negotiate an interpretation of her experience. It is true, therefore, that to prevent misrepresentation, widows have to tell their own stories as a way of healing each other, before allowing researchers to feed their curiosity on their painful experiences.

In her narrative Qondi tells of how she lied to visitors about why she slept in her son's room. When her son asked her for permission to move into his father's bedroom she told him he had no right to her 'bedroom' She lied to him because she was still battling with the sad memory of the rejection that she associated with that room. So, how she narrates her story is symbolic of all the battles she still has to fight inside herself. The Personal Narrative Group expresses its strong concern on the above issue, "Rather than labeling a story true or untrue, interpreters need to look for the reasons why narrators tell their stories." (The Narrative Group. 1991:203).

The way the narrator tells her story might be different from the way she had perceived things earlier. Evidence of this is Nyamie's contentment with the way her husband's funeral was arranged and at the multitudes that attended it. She believes "he had to die to take us where we are today". Certainly, this thought is based on the current political development in South Africa, sixteen years after his death. It is possible that her feelings at the time of her bereavement were different from what she feels now. This perception, however, cannot be dismissed as untrue because it is the sense she has made of her loss.

The narratives express a need for a new identity for the widows, a new self-discovery. In response to a question on how her loss changed her life, Nyamie says, "I had lost a partner. … Yah! Part of you, you know. Part of who you are." Certainly, the lost part of the grieving individual has to be rediscovered. The acknowledgement of the loss also suggests the quest that prompts widows to conduct themselves in a particular manner. It is this quest that made Qondi leave her home, discreetly, for a holiday in Durban – so that she could be herself. Their revelations will make their societies see them for who they really are. The community could also learn that widows, a subordinate group, have a different interpretation of their reality. (Collins. 2001:184). While her community had lost a political agitator, Nyamie had lost " a partner, a confidant, a father of my children. … you lose also, the source of support." Many who had witnessed her rise as a political activist must have been convinced that she was over her grief, yet she had not even started. She expressed her gratitude to the TRC which helped expose the truth about her husband's death, so that she could grieve. This is who she is, a widow who could not grieve. Her initiative is an example of what widows should do – to voluntarily tell their stories in order to negotiate a way forward, side by side with their communities.

There is an element of possessiveness on the part of the widows about their stories. Qondi had a concern over the purposes of the research as though to safeguard her experiences. Her concerns made me realize it is her story, and she did not wish it to be handled in any way. Nyamie displayed the same possessiveness when she had to explain her 'floating' on the day of the funeral. She says, "How? I'll tell you one other day." The statement required me to respect that territory of her story. It is such concerns that shape

a personal narrative, making them " inevitably partial and situated, [with the narrator cautious about] what is said and what remains unsaid," (Walker. 1999:67).

In the light of the element of possessiveness that is suggested above, it is clear that being represented by outsiders will always lead to inaccurate perceptions of who widows really are. An example of such misrepresentation is found in a comparison of Maryse Conde's A Season in Reharta, (1975) and Jaques Roumain's Masters of the Dew, (1978). While Conde takes the position of a disillusioned African in the Diaspora, Roumain takes that of a committed African who knows his country from experience. In the two texts the theme of isolation is used against the all-inclusive Pan-Africanist ideal. Conde's negation of the Pan-Africanist ideal can only be attributed to the short period, twelve years, she had spent on the continent. Despite this, she was so convinced that she had learnt enough about it that she wrote to warn Africans against celebrating an idealized Africa because the reality is frustrating. The message of the text suggests that Conde, who had followed her husband from France to Guinea, was prejudiced against the continent. The prejudice is implied by her preconception that African women are marginalized by their race, culture, education, political and economic situations. She is therefore not the right person to represent them. Her reaction to the continent can be set against that of Leopold Senghor, an African from Ethiopia who was a product of the French assimilationist policy. When he returned to Africa, " he had to settle down and rediscover what it was to be an African." (Moore. 1980:76). Senghor was conscious that he needed to experience being an African before he could be their legitimate representative and leader in the struggle for a positive identity for Africans.

Knowing a country involves knowing its people as well. How, then, can Western

feminists represent African women when they have not given themselves time to know Africa and her people? The result is summed up by Belenky. "The statement implied by the representation of the oppressed African women by Western feminists is that there is 'I-who-have-made-it and You-who-have-not-made-it'(Belenky. 1997:85). Thus the circulation of the Third World Women's Issue only serves to advertise the specialness of the mediating first(?) world woman." Funani challenges the very knowing of an outsider to an experience. The knowing of the researcher and that of the owner of the experience are certainly different. Funani. 1992:66). According to Mama, (2001) the distance between the Western feminist and the African woman impacts negatively on the way the researcher perceives the African woman's experiences. (Mama. 2001:60) The result is inaccuracy.

Unlike Conde, Roumain celebrates Africa and pays tribute to her women for their role in the development of the continent as well as their efforts to keep the fires burning in their homes. An ardent Pan-Africanist from Jamaica who had attended most of the Pan-Africanist Congresses that were organized in France, Roumain creates a central character that seeks to unite his divided community. Manuel returns from fifteen years of being a labourer in the sugar plantations of Cuba to find his village ravaged by the effects of a drought that had lasted longer than usual. But because he was blinded by the good memories he had about the village, it takes time for him to notice the parched grass when he gets off the bus. When he learns that the drought had also led to a division of the population into two factions, he decides that a solution would only come through a Pan-Africanist approach with a small 'p'. The approach calls upon the oppressed people to take it upon themselves to change their situation. He embarks on a mission to unite the

divided community and to reclaim the village's legitimacy through a prolonged search for water.

The collective spirit of Pan-Africanism on a communal level is what Roumain preaches in Masters of the Dew. He decides to use the feud between community members as a stepping stone to unity rather than take sides. He does not just identify the problems of the village, but sets out to solve them, with the people. Consequently, the novel ends with the community singing a coumbite song, which was usually sung when they joined hands to help each other in the fields. Women watch the spectacular scene of water flowing from the mountains into their fields, the rain that was Manuel's reward. The portrayal of the villagers' acceptance of Manuel's leadership and the hard work they did to get water is a far cry from the lazy and corrupt villagers in Conde's A Season in Reharta. One of her characters, Sokambi, is an industrious widow who overcomes all obstacles to be self-supporting. Despite this, Conde uses her to portray the marginality of African women. In Conde's novel nobody does anything about her Africa, who needs rehabilitation. This is what would happen to the situation of widows if they allow themselves to be represented by outsiders from their experience. They need pioneers like, Roumain's Manuel, from among themselves, who will toe the line towards a true portrayal of all widows.

Spivak "urges academic feminists to speak to the subaltern woman, to learn from her repository of lived experience." (Belenky. 1997:89). This could signify a recognition of the oppressed woman,'s position as the owner of her experience, but widowhood can only be learnt through experience. Qondi testifies in her narrative that it was only after she had been widowed that she understood that what she thought she knew and understood about widowhood was far from the reality. Even African feminists, who are

much closer to the experience than their Western counterparts, do not qualify to represent widows, as long as they have not gone through that experience. It is through their own voices that widow characters in all literatures will be perceived for who they are, that the broken bridges between families and communities will be rebuilt and widows will regain their sense of belonging as who they really are. They need to be motivated not to 'unsay' their stories, but to say them because, "If [they] don't, [the Other] will not fail to fill the blanks on [their] behalf, …, [the Other] works towards [their] erasure …" (Neameka. 1997:50).

While the widows take the long journey "to put the knower back in the known and claim the power of their minds and voices," others should learn to listen. (Belenky. 1997:19). It would not serve the purpose of language as a 'tool for representing experience' (Belenky. 1997:24) if it did not pass back and forth between the narrator and her audience. Both she and her audience should speak and listen to each other. Only through this interchange will widows enter into the social and intellectual lives of their communities. Without these interchanges, "individuals remain isolated from others, without tools of representing their experience, people also remain isolated from the self." (Belenky. 1997:25-26).

5. CONCLUSION

The necessity for oral narratives as a social form of integrating individuals into their societies and a means of making sense of the experiences lived by these individuals can not be overlooked. It is clear that the value of the narration of personal experience is immeasurable, for the owner of the experience and those who will interact with the narrative. Through narratives, understandings develop between individuals and their societies; myth is replaced by facts, and therefore reality of their situations. If this were acknowledged with regard to Xhosa widows, they would regain their status in their communities; their self- esteem would be boosted and they would regain their positions as assets in their communities. Letting the widows speak, listening to their stories and seeing them for who they really are is the kind of support women need because it gives them "forms of status, independence and security," (Isabel Hofmeyer. 1993: 27).

This may sound easy, but not for a Xhosa widow because of her culture which prescribes silence as a major component of her mourning process. When this period ends, not everybody is willing to listen to her narration of her experience with the culture. The widow, therefore, has to either restrain herself from sharing the beautiful memories she has of her husband, which keep her going in her period of loneliness; or is burdened with the sad memories which, if shared, could bring her relief and the support she needs. As a result, when the Xhosa widow narrates her experience to the few who are willing to listen and those she trusts, it is not because she wants those issues to be resolved, but to say she has also been there. Her silence is an attempt to protect her status, but deprives herself of the liberating effects of the narration of one's personal experiences. While the widow observes the mourning ritual, members of her community see her as an object of

observation and make assumptions about what she is going through. These are the people who later claim the right to tell her story. This marks the beginning of her misrepresentation, and therefore her disappearance as we never hear her speak (Gandhi, L. 1988:17).

Due to the unique nature of African cultures, and the experience of every individual, there is a necessity for Xhosa widows to break the silence of the culture of mourning. They have to open the cultural door and let out the myth about who they are. There is no way that the culture of mourning will be re-evaluated if the widows do not claim their space through the narration of their stories. The widows should rely neither on feminist nor womanist movements as subscribers to these movements could be outsiders to their experiences, due to race, class, positions of power, distance and status. Because of the diverse nature of women, their situations and, therefore, experiences, they need different spaces to evaluate ways of dealing with their differences. If this is overlooked, the subordination and oppression to which the widows are subjected by other women will go unchallenged. (Holland-Muter. 1999:46).

Unlike other gender issues that have been handled by white feminists and researchers, empowered by their advantaged position in the apartheid South Africa, stories of the widowhood of Xhosa women cannot be told by them. If they allow this they run the risk of their experiences being judged by the white cultural standards which have been regarded as the standard for judging the experiences of others. (Holland-Muter. 1999:46). If black widows allow their stories to be told by white researchers and feminists, they will be subordinating themselves through the use of the other's language. As is suggested by Holland-Muter, before women of different backgrounds can claim the

right to represent each other, they have to bridge the gap by 'engaging in conversations across difference'. If women fail to acknowledge their differences, they will "continue to ignore how some groups of women dominate and oppress others," (Holland-Muter. 1999:47).

The silencing of Xhosa widows and their willing co-operation with it is in itself a refusal to acknowledge the differences in women that are suggested by Holland-Muter. As long as there are no 'conversations across difference' between Xhosa women, it can never be agreed that Xhosa widows are oppressed by the women in their communities who take part in deciding on how they would observe the culture of mourning. Through their acceptance of the suffering that a widow has to go through, the widows give in to the dominating group. They need to wake up, shake off their fears and take the first steps towards their correct identity. The door to their suffering should not be left open for the next generation to come in and suffer the same fate. Widows have roles to play in their communities. How, then, can they be successful in such roles and their careers if they remain oppressed at home? Since it is evident that the dynamic nature of culture does not go as far as transforming the Xhosa culture of mourning, it is for the widows to wage war against it. They have the weapons – their will to speak and the ability to speak.

Widows' rights to speak should not only be a feminist struggle, but a human rights issue in which men and women join hands to liberate women from the oppressive culture. It has taken the initiative of a woman, Dr, Mamisa Chabula, to open a debate on the high death rate of boys while at initiation schools. This culminated in the passing of legislation with regard to the observance of the culture. So, though men are exempted from the observance of the culture of mourning, they can play a significant role in its

transformation. Women in Africa, especially in the struggle for political liberation in South Africa, have fought side by side with men. Even in this struggle, to liberate themselves from an oppressive culture, unity is still the pre-requisite. Men and women should create space for widows to speak whenever they decide to speak.

The same culture that oppresses its widows has an empowering and liberating idiom which suggests that a baby who does not cry dies without anybody noticing. So whenever the widows lack the courage to raise their voices, they should remember that, *usana olungakhaliyo lufel'embelekweni* – a baby that does not cry dies at birth.

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7. APPENDIX 1

7.1 INTERVIEW WITH NYAMEKA GONIWE

Date : September, 28, 2001

Place : Rondebosch, Cape town.

It is a sunny spring day, and I am waiting for Nyameka, (who will be referred to as Nyamie) to pick me up for the interview. I am sitting at The Health Cuisine, a Coffee Shop in Rondebosch, Cape Town. I have chosen a table close to the window, so I am looking down at the traffic that zooms through either to the city of Cape Town or Claremont. I have made myself a picture of my subject, Nyamie. I saw her on television when she testified to the TRC, but that was five years ago. Judging by her voice on the phone and her enthusiasm at the theme of my research when I requested an appointment with her, she should be a pleasant lady. When I called her from East London she was out of office. She returned my call and we talked for about an hour.

When I introduced my topic to her I identified a willingness to talk, not just about herself, but other people with painful experiences. She talked of her experience not as an individual, but a member of a group. She talked about what she is doing to help heal memories of fallen soldiers of the liberation struggle in South Africa. Her focus area is Cradock, where she originates from and where her late husband, Matthew Goniwe, fell. This willingness to help was extended to myself as I had lost my husband in violent political circumstances. She recommended that I attend a session with Healing of Memories, an institution in Cape Town that helps people deal with painful memories.

She expressed disappointment at the TRC's failure to help victims of political violence to heal after their testimonies. We then fixed an open appointment for the September

school vacation. She explained her tight schedule, but promised to accommodate me. On the day of the interview I agreed with her, her schedule is tight. Because of this, as I sat at the coffee shop I drafted a list of questions that I intended to ask. It had become clear that I could miss asking important questions as the interview had to be between meetings. When we met she was warm and relaxed. On our way out of the coffee shop she was greeted by a white man sitting at one of the tables. They hugged and addressed each other on first name basis. On the way to her office I read the questions to her, trying to make use of every minute available.

By the time we reached her office I was already calling her Sis' Nyamie. She had a meeting to attend, but had time to take me through the offices until we came to hers. During the interview she read out each question before responding to it, perhaps to give herself time to collect her thoughts, which made it possible for the questions to be recorded as evidence.

Vivie : How did you observe the culture of mourning?

Nyamie : How I observed the culture of mourning. I can only say the nature of mourning for a husband, … I didn't …. It didn't require me to go through the culture of mourning because, as you know, it was an unnatural death. In any case, e-eh …, it was good to have people around. As you know, culturally, people gathered for weeks and e-eh … the news arrived and people gathered. They were ever there to share the pain. It was not necessarily … it was not known immediately that they had been killed, you know that. Once you know, it changes the whole nature of … of why people gather there, because there was

a sense. In a way they had gathered there, yah, we didn't know where they were. At some stage we thought they had been detained. It was only after two days of knowing that they had disappeared that we got to know .... We got to know ... the car was found. So, e-eh, generally, I have felt that, you know, I was so active. And I had to be in the front, you know, in the search for bodies. I had to be involved in many things, in trying to find out what had happened at the time and dealing with journalists. So I wasn't mourning. And e-eh , to such a degree that I felt I needed that, that space to be quiet and be calm, to feel, to be In touch with my own feelings. So it didn't happen in my case. This was a known person. People from all over wanted information from me. So there wasn't that space to mourn at all. But in having people around me, they shared that pain with me. I wasn't, you know, like traditionally, allowed to mourn.

Vivie : Does the fact that you didn't have time to mourn suggest that you had to shelve your grief for a later time?

Nyamie: It had that, in a way, that impact on me. E-eh, there was a time I felt I wished this could subside, the hype, political crowds, to hide, the activities – so that I could claim space around me, myself, and be able to grieve.

Vivie : So, Instead of being a widow, you were treated as a celebrity.

Nyamie : There was also that element, because, you know, ... You must understand that this was the death of a celebrity, not only for Cradock, (but) the Eastern Cape, the country, almost everywhere. So it was just ... so the whole, the eyes of the world were watching, focusing here.

Vivie : How would you have preferred to do it (mourning)? This question becomes

irrelevant as you did not mourn.

Nyamie :Yah! It's irrelevant. But I think the value, …. There is value in the way Africans mourn. E-eh, let alone the other things, I mean the other e-eh … the other flipside of it; you being forced to do these things, instead of you valuing that moment, and whatever, whatever benefits it gives you. You get to … you get to be used, you know, …. But there is value [in mourning].

Vivie : But the value gets lost because of it being forced.

Nyamie: Absolutely! I agree. But you only realize that value when you don't grieve. Then you feel there's something missing.

Vivie : Like when you are in the process of mourning it's like you are doing it …

Nyamie: Yah! That's the pity with this e-eh … with it. You know, when you are observing the ritual of mourning, you have to do it for yourself. But with … in our case you don't. You do it because it has been prescribed for you. And so the value gets to be lost. It gets lost. *(A deep sigh).*

Vivie : How did your loss change your life?

Nyamie: Benefits and detriments! O-oh! Yah! I had lost a partner, a confidant, father of my children. E-eh, you lose also, the source of support, and e-eh …. Yah! Part of you, you know, part of who you are, you know.

Vivie : Since you were in the movement, were you looked at differently? Like your dignity. How was it affected? Your stand in society?

Nyamie: Okay! Well, I didn't, again, the difference because you would, ordinarily, you would lose a partner and you get to be pushed into widowhood, with all kinds of stigmas. It did not apply to me. In fact, because this was a revered leader, the

community had expectations. I mean, people expected me to slot into what Matthew was doing. It was not in everything, but you know, in a way it was, being pushed to.

Vivie : The spirit of regeneration. One leader dies and another comes up.

Nyamie: It's an assumed position. People don't understand. You just want to be quiet, and not to be anything else. You're fine by yourself.

Vivie : At the funeral, I know there is so much activity. The coffin is carried high, running. How did you take that?

Nyamie: Well, I mean, again, because you tend to get to understand the culture of burials, especially political funerals. I wasn't affected by … by it. Instead I was e-eh, appreciative of it. Because e-eh … because this was the leader who was horribly killed by the system and to be given a particular type of …, of burial which, which …. There were many things that we expected that funeral to be. And one of these things was to be … to … to be some kind of statement, to protest; to serve as a profit, as a … to serve as a … what? Anything! To rebel against the system. There was also that.

Vivie : So it was a way of healing.

Nyamie: The indication is right. There is some kind of satisfaction you get out of that because you are at war, war. You don't know where you are. You are parting with those whom you e-eh … the guards who care. Yah! When I talk of benefits and detriments.

Vivie : How was your relationship with your in-laws before and after your bereavement?

Nyamie: Yah! To me it was, it was …. I've always had good relations with my in-laws.

They perfectly knew. All, my mother-in-law and my brothers, my brothers-in-law, they all rallied around me. They supported me entirely. So I can say it's a kind of relation I still maintain with the family. I mean, I don't have to be connected with them, but I know they're my brothers.

Vivie : Hence you refer to them as brothers.

Nyamie: Yes! I mean, I got a lot of support from them, more than I got from my own family, Yah! Yah! And they supported me with the kids. I mean, we have a …. It's a close-knit family; a close relationship. We still maintain close relations.

Vivie : At the funeral, how did you behave? What was expected of you?

Nyamie: Well, at the funeral I was made to just sit there. It's like, it is the case of any funeral. Our funerals, you know, African funerals,…. They made some uniforms for us, of national colours, which we wore. And how did I behave? I was … I was …. Part of me was like e-eh, was not there. I was floating, I was drifting, I was e-eh …. Somehow I feel some force lifted me. Whenever I think of how I survived that funeral, I was lifted. How? I'll tell you one other day, I don't know, but I think it's how life …-, I don't know. Life has strange ways – how you cope. A-ah! I have so many things that made me cope. I mean, there was complete, … my mind completely shut down. For instance, in terms of reading, I couldn't read. Maybe I wasn't supposed to read anything. That would have aggravated my situation.

Vivie : Are you referring to reports on the death?

Nyamie: Yah! They came from the very first … yah! So I couldn't read. So I think my body, something took over. I was made to cope in different ways. In telling you

how I coped on that day; there was a sense of pride in me, that if Matthew could open up, I mean if he could wake up suddenly and see the whole world there, he would have been very proud of me. That gave me, you know, that made me shift a little bit and, and tell myself , maybe he had to die to take us where we are today. It helped me to rephrase, to shift, because you have to shift perspective, somehow, to survive.

Vivie : If you had to change anything in the culture of mourning, what would it be and why?

Nyamie: O-oh! I think, women, the widowed, especially women, do not need to be forced to … to … mourn for a period of time, I don't know. It needs to be left to the individuals. The value, they need to feel it because it's like, you have to do this because you are expected to do it. You are not doing it for yourself. That stands as proof that there is value in mourning, take it from me, because I didn't, and I felt the need afterwards. So it's not to be … it would not be good to see people not mourning. The element of force as prescription is not good. And if you want to wear black, you should be allowed to do that. If you don't want to, you want to display it in some other ways, that's fine. That needs to be left to the individual to decide.

Vivie : What is your experience of bringing up children as a widow?

Nyamie: Hard. You have lost everything and everything depends on you. I think they miss it, the children miss that. You can't be their father, and still you are pushed to be all these roles. It comes to be a hard responsibility.

At this stage Nyamie had to leave for her scheduled meeting.

When she returned I asked her about her testimony before the TRC.

She started with explaining why she testified. She told me it was not a question of choice. They, the widows of the "Pepco Four", were commanded to testify. She personally took the command and her compliance served as a continuation of the struggle. As widow activists, they had to take the lead and set the pace for other victims of the apartheid regime.

About bearing her wounds for the public to witness she believes it benefited her and the whole world. She said narrating her painful experience was a way of releasing some of that pain. She believes it also made a statement to other victims that they are not alone. She, however, expressed disappointment at the TRC's failure to have a program that would enhance the healing process. Despite her disappointment, she is grateful to the TRC as it shed light on the mysterious death of her husband.

She explained how the witness protection program of former perpetrators, like Dirk Coetzee, broke down the barriers behind which her husband's killers had taken refuge. The program and the possibility of amnesty resulted in the perpetrators distrusting each other. They did not know how much Dirk Coetzee had already divulged and therefore feared twisting facts or withholding information as it could jeopardize their chances for amnesty. Unknown to the perpetrators, they confessed to the gruesome murder of the "Cradock Four". Nyamie believes, were it not for the TRC, the killers would have taken the truth to their graves. She agrees that hearing about the circumstances of her husband's death opened new wounds, but that was necessary. She had to know the truth so that she could grieve.

Nyamie now works for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Rondebosch,

Cape Town. On 10 November, 2001 I attended a community healing program at the town hall in Cradock. The main item of the agenda was the launch of a documentary on the life of Nyamie Goniwe – Nyameka's Story. I had been invited to the launch by Nyamie and this was very significant to me as a researcher. It demonstrated her willingness to participate. As we sat waiting for the program to begin, the container of the video cassette of Nyamie's story stood open on the table at the front of the hall. On the cover, a black and white picture of Matthew Goniwe, her husband, towers over a colour photo of his wife who is sitting at a table.

The hall was gradually getting packed. I noticed that the majority of the people were blacks of different ages, from babies in their parents' arms to a noticeable group in their fifties. They must have been Matthew's comrades in the struggle for liberation. Even the Congress Choir that was to sing was made up of elderly people. There were a few whites and coloureds and they happened to be Nyamie's guests. As soon as it was announced that the program would begin in ten minutes, a group of young men, among them mayors and councilors, broke into a powerful freedom song. The theme of the first song was that they knew Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sicelo Mhlauli and Sparrow Mkhonto. The song was ended with the popular toyi-toyi dance. At the rhythm of the stamping feet the elderly could no longer contain their excitement. They jumped to their feet, but had difficulty lifting their legs to the 90 degrees of the youth. The second song was *Iziyolo zalo mhlaba masiziyeke okwethutyana,* meaning we have to let go of worldly joys for a moment.

Earlier I had commented to my daughter that most of the people who walked past us as we sat in the foyer looked like casualties of war. They bore scars of a violent past. They

limped past us, hopped with the aid of their walking sticks or were pulled by others who bore their own scars. I asked myself if they were perhaps casualties of the war that had been waged by the apartheid government against black people in South Africa.

Before the video was shown, the mayor of Lingelihle made a welcoming speech. He expressed an attitude of national pride about the launch of "Nyameka's Story". He also expressed a claim that the community had on the story as it was not only about Nyamie's life story, but Cradock as a whole. The effect that the story had on shaping the minds of the people was evident in his speech as he stated that the meeting was not about the launch of a video, but the launch of a beginning of a program of reconciliation that people had to embark on.

Another speaker who shared the same view was Prof. Villa-Vicencio, who works with Mrs. Goniwe at The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town. He said the murder of the Cradock Four robbed the country of potential leaders. However, the murders turned them into national symbols. He thought it was such deaths that brought democracy to our country. He also saw the video as an attempt at healing the Cradock community and South Africa as a whole. He said South Africans needed to take tragic moments of their history and ask what they can learn from them, then they would move forward.

Nyamie also talked about her project to heal memories of communities that were victims of human rights violations. She said she had to start at home, using her own story. She felt she had to start at the Lingelihle township. She invited the audience to find mechanism to heal emotions of the past. Dialogue was one of these. She emphasized that people needed to be given a sense of being listened to as this provides an opportunity to

release the pain and experience a sense of solidarity.

Before the video was played, the hall broke into another freedom song as if to salute their heroes. The video is made up of captions of Matthew Goniwe before his death, surrounded by excited mobs in Lingelihle township. It also shows part of his funeral. It is basically a narration of Nyamie's experience before and after Matthew's death. Most of the time Nyamie's voice is in the background. She speaks softly. There is no pain in her voice, no sign of grief on her face, but the pauses defy a deep sense of loss that is suppressed. As she had told me when I interviewed her more than a month earlier that she never had time to keep quiet and mourn, she is shown on the video giving interviews to journalists on the day of the funeral.

Towards the end of the video a voice, not Nyamie's, talks of the day when the Cradock Four were killed. The field where their burnt bodies were found comes up on the screen. A burnt car is abandoned in the field. The camera takes us further into the field. Two or three skeletons lie a meter from each other. The shapes give the impression that they were burnt while in a sitting position, perhaps inside the car. There were gasps from the audience that had been watching silently. I looked at the charred bodies and at Nyamie on the other side of the hall. In my mind I asked, "if she can talk about reconciliation after this, who could not listen?" The video ends with Nyamie setting conditions for forgiving her husband's killers:

"All I'm asking from the people who killed my husband is a symbol of humanity …."

When it was over, there was time for discussions. It became clear that the message had reached the audience. They expressed a willingness to go forward and ask for guidance towards reconciliation. Their distrust of the former white agents of violence against

blacks was addressed. There was a general display of respect for Nyamie. As she and Prof. Villa-Vicencio responded to the questions, I remembered a poster I had seen in Nyamie's office in Cape Town. At the bottom was written: "Acknowledge the past, celebrate the present and challenge the future."

It came to my mind that with her story, Nyamie was doing exactly that. The memories are her past, by launching the video she was celebrating the present and her intention to help communities heal their memories is her way of challenging the future.

On my way out we met at the door and she asked for my opinion of the video. I told her how lucky she was to have people to listen to her story. She admitted the therapeutic effect of that willingness to listen. In her quiet manner, she was radiant, as though she was gratified by a mission accomplished.

I got time to speak to Fort Calata's widow, Nomonde. I asked her how she viewed the narration of Nyamie's story. She confessed to her being an emotional person. For her the narration brought back painful memories. She finds it hard to forget. She attributed this to the fact that Fort was not only a husband, but also a friend. She misses him. That week she had twice visited his grave.

7.2 A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO "NYAMEKA'S STORY."

In my fourteen-year old daughter's words, Nyamie is brave. Short of words to describe what she had just witnessed, my daughter decided to salute her as one brave lady. I cannot decide whether 'brave' is the right word for the way Nyamie is dealing with her painful memories.

I first got a taste of her experience when I interviewed her on 28 September 2001 in her Rondebosch office. I later wrote to her confessing how difficult it had been for me to

probe into her experience. I was supposed to respect that territory of her experience which she might have chosen to keep to herself. In response to one of my questions she had told me of her involvement in the healing of painful memories in African communities. If I had underestimated this vision, the video demonstrated how committed she is to it.

The value of the narration of "Nyameka's Story", for me, became clear after watching the video. While it played I was concerned with not missing the facts. I looked for parts that would be relevant for my research. When it was over and the audience sighed in one breath, I knew they had been touched. It was during the time allocated to responses that the value of the narration was highlighted. It had weaved a thread of unity through the audience. They were united in pain and pride. I turned to look at the speakers who asked questions, raised concerns or simply commented on the story. None of the speakers referred to the gruesome murders of the Cradock Four, nor the charred skeletons that feature in the video, but their disgust was written on their faces. The atmosphere was a mixture of grief and celebration, as though we were gathered to give our last respects to a fallen hero.

8. APPENDIX 2

8.1 INTERVIEW WITH QONDI MAPAPU

Date : 09 March 2002

Place : Her house in King Williams Town

I met Qondi today, Saturday, to arrange time for an interview with her tomorrow. When I tried to do this over the phone she insisted she wanted to see me before we could finalize the appointment. The idea of interviewing her had come to me back in 1998 when I was writing my autobiography. Then I was to talk to her about her brother's widow and she had been very keen to talk. But in 2002, Qondi was a widow herself, and she was not as keen to be interviewed. She admitted that she was overcome with fear. The idea of going back to her period of bereavement and of mourning frightened her.

Qondi wanted to know exactly what I am researching, what I would be asking her and what I would do with the information. As I answered her questions I realized that she was starting to relax. She started opening up and seemed not to mind if we were already doing the interview. Within a short time she had told me how painful widowhood was. She narrated a story of how she found herself telling a young bank consultant who was helping her sort out her husband's estate never to get married.

"Young man, you must never get married!"

"Why, *Sisi* (big sister)? I just got married!" replied the young man, shocked.

When I asked her why she gave such a negative advice to a young person she explained that, since her widowhood, she looks at young married couples and feel sorry for them. Her perception is that widowhood is like an enemy that follows married women around, waiting for the right time to strike. She told me of how she wanted to take her life after

her husband's death. The only thing that prevented her from doing it was her son. I sensed a deep sense of hatred for life since her widowhood. She hated that she had stayed in her failing marriage, hoping that things would change for the best, only to be a widow. She regrets that she did not escape widowhood while she still had time. She could not forget the black attire she had to wear on the day of the funeral.

Despite her initial uncertainty on whether to carry on with the interview the following day, she was so willing to talk that I had to stop her. We made an appointment for 10h00 the following morning.

Date : 10 March 2002

Place : King Williams Town

I arrived earlier than the set time. When I arrived Qondi was taking a bath. When she came out she was in a loose frock and looked livelier than the previous day. She led me down a long passage into a private lounge on the other end of the house. As I walked behind her, I looked from side to side, taking in the enormous size of the house. Once seated, she called her domestic helper and told her not to call her to the phone as she wanted no interruptions to the interview. Her son had gone to church.

I sat next to her on the leather couch. The interview just flowed, with her voice becoming softer whenever she wanted to emphasize a point. As she talked, the anger she still feels towards her husband was evident. Whenever she mentioned those things that hurt her, it was like she relived that moment. Despite this pain she never shed a tear during the interview.

When the interview was over, she asked her helper for something to drink. As we

walked to my car, she repeatedly told me how relieved she was. She told me she felt like something heavy had been lifted off her shoulders.

Vivie: Qondi, how did you feel when your husband passed away?

Qondi : It was on a Sunday. I hadn't been feeling well the whole day. I was panicking because the previous day I had taken Simon to hospital. I was asleep at 3.00 a.m when I received a call from the hospital. They wanted me to bring his family as his condition had worsened. I knew something had happened. Why would they want me to organize people? I was told it was him who was asking for them. Just then, our friends, Mr. Nteyi and his wife, arrived. They told me he had passed away.

Vivie : When you received the news of his death, how did you react?

Qondi : I cried a lot because I still had hope. He had been admitted at hospital several times and he always came back, better. So when he was admitted this time I was certain he would come back again. It was a shock to me that when he was admitted the previous day he was never to come back again.

I was … I was … *Yhu!* I can't explain how I felt. It was like I was going to lose my mind. I was calling everybody that I … especially widows because I knew I could trust what they would tell me.

Vivie : Despite your grief, what else did you think was affected by the death?

Qondi : The first thing was my child. I was worried about him. I wondered what he was going to do. My own health was not good, I'm diabetic. I thought this would affect me and would die soon. I was worried how he would survive alone. His family was far away in Grahamstown. I felt his life was going to change. I was

more and more concerned about my child.

Vivie : How old is the child?

Qondi : He's twelve years old. What actually hurt was that I felt for him because, as for me, I had already regarded myself as a widow.

Vivie : What do you mean?

Qondi : I mean my husband had not been part of my life for some time. He was unfaithful. He did not care about me. He was never at home. So, most of the time I was on my own. I therefore regarded myself as a widow. It's just that people were not aware that I was a widow. Most of the time I had to take care of my businesses by myself. When there was bereavement at my home I had to see what to do. When ill, I had to take care of myself. Everything! People only became aware of my widowhood when my husband passed away, when I had to wear the black mourning clothes. Whatever! So I was not worried much about myself. I had the feeling that, 'otherwise, I have already walked this path'. My only problem was that his person was not to be around.

Vivie : Who informed his family about his passing away?

Qondi : Mr. Nteyi quickly went to inform a Mr. Mapapu who lives in Zwelitsha. Then he [Mr. Mapapu] made calls to Port Alfred and Bathurst.

Vivie : When you met your in-laws after this, how did they treat you? How was the relationship between you?

Qondi : At first I was very tense, wondering what was to happen because I had witnessed how my elder sister-in-law [married to Simon's elder brother] was badly treated. Secondly, when they arrived I was not there. They arrived on a Monday. I had

gone to East London to apply for a death certificate. But, to my surprise, there was nothing. We communicated well. They asked me when I wanted the funeral to take place, what I wanted to do. You know? But what hurt me and depressed me was that while he [Simon] was ill, they had not been supportive. For example, they would complain when I told them that Simon was in hospital. They would complain that I made decisions alone; that when I decided to take him to hospital I just did that. What do I expect them to do with somebody who is already in Hospital? So I just had fears, thinking they would repeat what they did to my sister-in-law. But I was surprised when I realized that they were sweeter than I had thought.

Vivie : When one loses a husband, that marks the beginning of her widowhood. In your case, what marked this change?

Qondi : I don't understand you.

Vivie : When one becomes a widow, her dressing style has to change; her self-conduct as well. Sometimes the woman is told by her in-laws what to do. If there is evidence already that she is conducting herself well, they let her be. Were you ever told you should do this and that?

Qondi.: What happened on that Monday is that they remained there for a long time. Nothing was said [to me] except for a meeting where I wanted to know what was to be done. I explained, --- I tried to express all my wishes. Like, I don't want wreathes; I want to unveil a tombstone. They never complained. I had expected them to complain as they are conservative people. Like questioning my wish for no wreathes. I was always watching them. I gave them a chance to write the

obituary but Sai's elder brother felt I knew him better than them. So they gave me the latitude to compile the obituary. They were good to me up to the last moment. It was only after the funeral that the womenfolk consulted the men to ask what was to happen. They told me I had to wear black for six months. Again the women felt that since I'm a teacher, wearing black for six months among school children would be too much. They went back to the men to ask that the period be reduced to three months. So it was reduced to three months. The delegation of women went back to thank the men for allowing the reduction.

Vivie : What happened on the day of the funeral? How were you treated by your in-laws?

Qondi : Perhaps I'll always think they treated me well because I always compared my situation to that of my elder sister-in-law, in as much that I could see nothing wrong that they did. I was always sensitive that they shouldn't do anything funny. I want to say --- I was ready to tell them that 'I am not Nonyameko (her sister-in-law). I will not accept this and that!'. I was just ---. I was disappointed because nothing funny happened.

Vivie :What did you wear for the funeral?

Qondi : I was dressed in black, something that haunted me very much because on this day, Saturday morning, I just could not cope. They explained to me that I was going to wear these clothes. In fact, I was not told more than that it is black people's culture. I had prepared these black clothes, put them there and took a bath. But I couldn't put them on. I had to call other widows that were here. When they arrived I was impossible, crying and asking what was I expected to do with

these clothes. I had a feeling that only a widow could talk with me. There was nothing that a person who had never been a widow could tell me. They explained that, "You have to wear these clothes. This is how black people show that they care. If you refuse to wear them your in-laws will get a negative impression of you. Please calm down and put them on."

Vivie : Had you been given a choice on what was to be done after the funeral, what would you have chosen?

Qondi : At that time, Vivie, I was still very torn apart. At that moment I could have worn anything, if that would ensure peace. I would have worn it. It wouldn't have mattered. I was certain of one thing, that mourning, ... let me call it grief, is not what you wear, is not how you dress. Grief is what you feel inside, something that takes its time to heal.

People think when you have been told to wear these clothes, then you wear them. When you take them off, it [grief] is over. For example, about these clothes, this thing of six months, a request is made for it to be reduced to three months, it means, even to them it has no meaning except that people have to see that you are now in this situation. I don't think they understand it. To me it seems even to the people who prescribe these clothes for you, they have no meaning except that the public will be able to say "there goes a widow".

Vivie : What is your feeling about the word *'umhlolokazi'* [widow]?

Qondi : Vivie, I regard the word *'umhlolokazi'* as a label of some sort! Something that ... [pause] sets you apart from other people. Something that attracts attention to your conduct. In the first place, black people think when you lose someone, when you

lose a husband, you have to be someone that you are not. You have to be someone …. For instance, I love the sea very much. There were times when I wished that, in all that was happening, if I could go to the sea and just stay there, even if I would stay alone, perhaps things would be better. Even if I would stay alone! I mean alone, alone, alone! But I knew that would be very strange, something that had never been seen before. I would be wearing these black clothes. In the first place, people would wonder what I was doing at the sea in these clothes, because we [blacks] think people only go to the sea for pleasure. Then how could I go to the sea in these clothes? What would people, who saw me, think was wrong with me? So you end up feeling you shouldn't do those things you want to do, because you are this widow, you have to deviate from your way of life and live another one that you are not familiar with. As a result, when I speak of myself, when I speak of widows, which I realized after I had become a widow, I regard them as misfits. You belong nowhere! I think you can't belong fully to married women, you can't belong fully to divorced women, you can't belong fully to those unmarried. You are just a person! Even people see another person, not the old Qondi, they don't see that old Vivie.

Vivie : In other words you are saying, in the eyes of the public, your status is lowered.

Qondi : Ve-e-ry much, Vivie! Because people, in the first place, …. Other people sympathize with you, but they do so in a way that you don't approve of. I mean even Christians. You see, my widowhood, …. Firstly, I think situations of widowhood vary. This widow is different from the next one. Perhaps for this one widowhood came when they were still making plans. Let's say her husband had

been working in Johannesburg. And they were still planning for the husband to work nearer home. My widowhood, …. I said earlier that I had felt like a widow even before my loss, but now I didn't like it when people showed me that they took me like one. For example, I met an elderly woman in town, a member of the spiritual churches. She used to stay nearby. She knew most of my problems. She said something like, " You see Qondi, she knows all about God's power." I knew what she meant. She thought I was happy that my husband had passed away. But I'm not happy! Because people know the kind of life I lived, they think I'm going to be the happiest person. It's not like that. Losing a husband is losing a husband! Well, I lived that kind of life, but I still had hope that things would be right. His death made me feel that …. It had a great impact, Vivie, because I still had hope. And people are now starting to say things that are hurting – people thinking I'm going to be happy. Some even comment that, "You are going to be happy now!" This person thinks …. Perhaps I'm going to be happy, I won't dispute that, I don't know. But so far there has been nothing that makes me think I'm happy. I think I'm not happy now.

Vivie : While you were in the black clothes, which you were not used to, how do you think they affected other people?

Qondi : People are different, you know. With others I would be hurt when I saw someone approaching, and all of a sudden she disappeared into a shop. I'd sense that she was avoiding me. Others would wave from a distance and it would be clear that they didn't want to meet me. I wouldn't know whether it was out of sympathy or fear, I don't know. You end up thinking people look at you in a funny way. If you

are in town, Vivie, you realize that people just vacate when you are around. If you go into Milady's, a person will leave. Others will point fingers at you. If you walk behind people, they suddenly turn, and you realize that they are talking about this widow. It does not make you feel good.

In the first place, the black clothes draw the attention of criminals. At one time I was going up-and-down between Standard Bank and Old Mutual. From Old Mutual I went to ABSA and withdrew some money. As I walked from the bank a young man patted me on the shoulder, *"Sisi*, do you perhaps know where a Moslem chemist that used to be here moved to?" Because I was upset by the unpleasant treatment I had received at Old Mutual and Standard Bank, I didn't answer him, but simply shrugged my shoulders to show that I didn't know. There was a man not far from me. He [the young man] also asked this man who swore at him. The young man took out a switch, *Tshwip! Tshwip!* on my legs. He was cursing all this time that, "Even if you refuse to talk, your money has turned into [brown] paper. There's no reason why you won't speak to me!" On my way from ABSA I had wanted to cry, so I knew if I opened my mouth to respond to this young man I would break down. I went into the Standard Bank and decided not to go to the tellers, but find a private corner. I asked myself, "Oh God, what is this?" I think these people had been watching me. They saw me as I was going up-and-down between the Standard Bank and Old Mutual. They were watching every move. Perhaps they had been following me, I don't know. I took out the money and saw that it was still there. That day I called Mr. Nteyi. I wanted to share this with somebody. I was not asking to be released from the black clothes, but I felt

they attracted attention to me. In the first place we are all here in King William's Town. So it is easy to identify a new widow. 'This one is new! She's fresh!' Your clothes can tell that you are new. It becomes clear that you haven't been a widow for a long time. So you don't feel safe as a widow.

Sometimes people show sympathy that makes you ask, "What's this?" The other day I had parked in front of the Post Office. As I was reversing out, I drove into a furniture bakkie. Two men came out. They didn't create a scene, but I could see they had that attitude, "Oh shame! Poor widow! You've just had a painful experience. No wonder you caused the accident. Don't drive!" The way I became arrogant! I told them, "No, I bumped into your car just like any other person! I didn't bump into it because I'm wearing black!" And I did things, shouting. You can imagine! A widow is not supposed to be involved in shouting scenes. But I'm a human being! I've got to (shout) when something makes me angry. That's what people do with you, Vivie. You realize that, hey! You don't know how you should behave.

One day I was at … I had stopped at Steers. Perhaps I had forgotten that I am a widow. I walked fast. I don't know what I had wanted to get from Steers, but I was in a hurry. There were two youngish men around.

'Sisi!" They said.

Something told me to look back, so I turned. It was cold on that day.

"You should prepare a meal at your house, we're coming," said one.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Cooking! Cooking! Prepare salads. Cook, we're coming."

The second time I answered I asked, "Does a widow usually cook for men?"

"No *Sisi,* we didn't realize you're a widow!" said one of them.

"How is that? Because you can see how I'm dressed."

"The way you're so smart! One could say you've got your best on," replied another.

Look! I went into Steers and sat there for a while. If you don't wear these clothes, ... These are the clothes you wear everyday. You have to make yourself smart in them. But it could appear as though you don't see the significance of these clothes; you want to look smart; you are fancy. If you look funny, what will that be? How can I just wear something that, that has been sewn, with no professional touch? What's this!

Vivie : You teach at a primary school. What did your learners say when you started coming to school in black?

Qondi : Perhaps they'd already been told because I couldn't notice anything. But after I had changed the mourning clothes, there is that ... ceremony that I want to tell you about. That's another hurting thing, Vivie. On this day I arrived dressed in something rather light. I was wearing something green. I was smart! My class was too excited! They were excited and saying,

"*Yhu* Mam! You are so smart!

"*Tyhini!* Am I usually foolish?" I asked.

"Ye-es! You are usually not smart!" they said.

"How?" I asked. I'm usually a person ... Even at school they know me. They usually say I spoil my learners. My kids are free. For instance, if they want to call

me by my first name, they do so. I don't have a problem.

"Oh, you were foolish!" they said.

"How?"

"*Yhu* Mam! Those black things you've been wearing scared us!"

"Don't you know that people don't do that anymore?" asked another.

"When elderly people are in mourning they don't wear those clothes anymore," she continued.

I had to make them understand that homes differ from one another. I told them my husband's family wanted me to dress like that.

"Why did you agree with them?" came the question.

I explained that a person has to please others and not do as he/she wishes. But they were so happy and said things like;

'Other [lady] teachers have been dressing smart and you were not. They've been doing their hair nicely and you always had your black hat on. Even when …'

There must have been a function at school where they had thought I'd be smartly dressed. Sometimes I like dressing in my best. It seems my situation worried them. They told me they couldn't look at me. What hurt me most was when they said I frightened them. If I frightened these who could talk to me, my own class, how many more were frightened and I can never know that?

Vivie : What are the ages of your learners?

Qondi : I teach grade four. They are between nine and ten.

Vivie : Tell me about the ceremony for changing mourning clothes. What happens?

Qondi : I phoned my in-laws about the changing of clothes, reminding them that the

three-month period was over. As I'm a teacher and on several occasions had had to take leave as I had health problems, I had thought I should make use of a long weekend that was in August. I went there and they had prepared *umqombothi* - traditional beer. Oh Vivie! That hurt me very much! I was put there and the admonishing started. 'You will remain our child. Your husband's brothers are your husbands, when you have a problem you should consult them. As our child, you must not stay away from us because in the end you won't be able to perform cultural rites for your son. And we reprimand you! You are not going to cry here!' They shout at you that you can't be in tears all the time. Sometimes nothing hurts me like …. There is an initial ceremony where they say they are making departing beer, two weeks after the funeral. You are still very hurting at this time. In both ceremonies nothing hurts me like the fact that all these people – they have called neighbours and explained this. These people are happy. They are enjoying themselves over my sorrow! For them it is time for pleasure; it's time for their talks as they enjoy the beer. They talk about those things and it becomes clear that they are enjoying themselves. There is no evidence of any consideration that there is somebody who is not happy about all this. As a result, in both ceremonies I would leave in the middle to go and rest.

Vivie : On this day of changing the clothes, are you admonished?

Qondi : When these clothes are changed, …. In the first place, on the very day you have to wake up and put on these clothes. These women arrive, your in-laws. Then you have to change into something else. The mourning clothes have to be burnt. But because times have changed, these women said, 'Don't burn these clothes. Give

us only one that can be burnt. Even that one may not be burnt, but you'll have to give it to somebody. But it must not be somebody whose husband is still alive. You must give it to somebody who had lost her husband, or an elderly member of your husband's family'. I credited them for this. One of them even said, although I'm not certain whether she was sarcastic or not, 'Oh! How can you burn these children's Foschinis? Because she can still wear them, things like a jersey. This burning must come to an end. She must give us just one dress that can be burnt or given to an elderly woman in the family'.

Then you are admonished that …. O-oh! A number of things which I think confine you to live the life of a widow. You must do nothing! Like, your child should always know that he belongs to this family. You mustn't take your child with you if you get married again. That is, they expect you never to marry again. You must bring up your child among this family. You mustn't think now that you don't have a husband you are going to let your child grow up among your family, because he is not theirs. And you realize that although they don't come clean, they expect you to live a life different from other people's.

Vivie : These days when one loses a husband people associate it with financial benefit. What was your situation?

Qondi : Vivie, the only thing that people …. People do not care about death. As a result, I usually say people who still have husbands wish for something that they don't wish for. That is, they envy the financial element [of losing a husband]. They think when your husband dies, there's money. But, funny enough, while she envies that you are going to have money; you are going to be independent; have a

big house; cars; you are going to have whatever, she does not want her husband to die. Do you understand me now when I say they wish for something they don't want? Money is the first and last evil. Every body comes to borrow money. A person comes asking for an amount … on earth, my God! Is there any one who can give money, R10 000 as a loan to a person who says, "I just want to clear my accounts. I'll repay it in installments?"

One day, Vivie, I was feeling good about myself. I was walking in town. My child was to go away, I think he was going to Grahamstown with his [school] rugby team. I had gone to buy him things he would need. As I was walking at Shoprite I met a lady.

"Qondi, can you please give me money to pay for this cake?"

She was carrying a cake in a box.

"No *maan*, money is the last thing I have," I replied.

"No *maan* Qondi! Please give me, ten rand only!

"Truly, I don't have it," I said.

"Oh Qondi, even after your husband's death?"

Vivie, I kept quiet for a second. When I opened my mouth I said;

"Yhu! You have offended me!"

She jumped at me, laughing," Oh, how have I offended you?"

I was now walking away. I must have taken two steps from her and I broke into a sharp scream, right there at Shoprite. There was chaos! Unfortunately for me, on that day I was by myself. I don't usually go out alone. My colleagues usually accompany me. I broke into a sharp cry and there was chaos. My phone was flung

away. I could see that the lady was now having a problem. People wanted to know from her what had happened.

"No, it's something we didn't agree on."

Look, I couldn't even buy those things anymore. I went to sit in my car, and she was with me, pleading. Any way, what surprised me in her pleas was the statement that 'we are these temptations you were told about'. You can imagine. I simply gave up. What did she mean? So people deliberately offend you because you have been warned that there will be temptations. So, as a widow, you have to bear with such temptations. I went home, Vivie, without the things I had gone to buy. It was in the evening that I asked my aunt to go and get them. What I mean is that to be a widow involves a number of things.

You get a visit from somebody you never thought .... *Mos* , financial matters, you have people that you deal with, but somebody will write you a letter. The other day I received a letter from a friend. We were brought together by our children who go to the same school. They usually have sleep-overs here and at her house. I received this letter. At first I thought she was asking for R20,00 . Somewhere it said 'I won't disappoint you'. I then thought I should read it again. My God! R2 000, 00. Look Vivie, these are things that make me angry because when your husband dies you have financial problems. I'm left with a child. He's still young. I have to see what to do. Then there are people who think as I sit here I have R2 000,00 that I can simply pull out and give to them. What is that?

Vivie : Didn't your in-laws claim some of your husband's property?

Qondi : They never did anything, shame. Instead I could feel for them – they would

report certain things to me. They report things like so-and-so is sick. Because of who I am, I would take this as a gesture that they wanted to show me that they regard me as one of their family. I help where I can. They never did things that I had thought they would do. I've said that I was always on the look-out that they didn't do the things they did to my sister-in –law. I had told myself that they were not going to do it to me. In the end I realized that it [the treatment] was one way of fighting her. Because with me they were very good, Vivie, I told myself perhaps they wanted to show her that they were going to treat me well.

Sometimes I think perhaps it was because she is not educated. Perhaps with me they say, 'oh, this mistress', because I fail to understand why we would be given different treatment while married to the same family. So I don't know, I can't say what was going on. What I have realized lately is that, now that all those ceremonies for changing clothes are over, they have sort of distanced themselves. But, funny enough, when there's something they need, [financial] assistance, they know how to contact me. For example, there was an initiation ceremony for my sister-in-law's [Simon's sister] son. They informed me. They'll then stay for weeks without calling, but when there's something they want me to help with, they'll call. Otherwise they don't demand anything. Instead, I voluntarily do things for them.

Vivie : Yesterday you said something about your bedroom. What is your feeling about it?

Qondi : I don't want to lie, I don't sleep there [soft voice]. I have said I became a widow before my widowhood. By the time my husband died I think we had been

sleeping in separate bedrooms for three years. So, really, I have no attachments with that room. I'm not scared of it. In the first place I am not afraid. It's just that I'm used to sleeping in the spare room, with my child. For a long time I've been sharing a room with Xola [her son], but now I can see that he's becoming a big boy. He no longer wants to sleep in the same room with me. So I'm sure it has to do with the fact that I had nothing to do with his (her husband's) room. Also, … *he-e!* I don't know how to put it. To me that room had labels – that the person in there is cruel; he doesn't want me. So nothing makes me want to sleep in that room. For instance, the bedroom suite in there is beautiful, you'll be surprised that to me it's naught. I like the funny one where I sleep. There's nothing, nothing that identifies me with that room. As a result, my son has asked me to let him use it. I think he's asking himself questions about this room that's not being used. He asked, "Mama, can I have that room?" I couldn't agree to that. I told him, "No! Don't ask for my room." Sometimes I find myself defending the situation. When not in the mood to explain myself, I tell people who find me sleeping in the spare room that I'm not well. I tell them, "That room is too far. From here I can hear people coming in. It's better when I'm here." I just become defensive. Otherwise I don't like …. I find myself referring to this very often. Perhaps subconsciously I realize that it's wrong. I repeatedly say, "I'm going to move into my bedroom." My domestic helper sometimes asks when I'm moving in there. I always say, "I will move in. It's not even a year since Sai passed away." But I don't know if I will move in. I don't want to!

Vivie : You have told me the detriments of widowhood. Is there anything that has

happened to you and you think it happened because you are a widow; that if you were not it wouldn't have happened?

Qondi : What kind of things, Vivie?

Vivie : Say, financial matters, if any. Visitors to your house; the friends you used to have. And you think this is happening to me only because I'm a widow.

Qondi : Okay, I understand you now. *Eyi!* There are many things! I said earlier people's perceptions of you change once you become a widow. My husband was very particular. I can just refer to the fact that although he drank, he was never reckless with his things. I therefore find it strange when his friends, I mean his friends, repeatedly ask me to lend them a car. As a result I had to tell one of them, "But you know the principle here. We don't lend cars to friends!" And you realize, Vivie, *mos* a person won't … In the first place, it is very rare for people to borrow cars. But people come to you because you're a widow, you can simply give it to him because you have these two cars. With others it becomes clear that they are saying, "Use the van and give me the BMW." You know! In the first place, these people know the kind of relationship I had with my husband. They know I seldom drove that BM. It's just there, I have nothing to do with it. In the first place, while I was still dressed in black, the BM used to draw attention to me. It was like people were saying, "O-oh! This widow drives a BMW!" I don't like it! I always drive my old van. It then becomes strange when somebody asks me for a car. Someone will call and say, "Can you give me the van? There is stuff I'm moving. My wife will drive mine and I'll drive yours." And you think, *he-e!* I don't know now. Why are they doing this to me? There are many things, Vivie,

that people will do. For example, a person will ask you to lend him a mower. You always …. "But you know my husband didn't lend things to his friends! Why do you …?" You see!

Vivie : As if they expect a change.

Qondi : People think when you lose a husband, even your conduct changes. Sometimes you are just sitting, enjoying yourselves, and you'll hear them say, "*Eyi!* Let's go, people. We are going to be asked where we come from. This one won't be asked." And you learn that … . Hey *maan!* People isolate you! In a way … in a way …. And they say things! Sometimes one will come to see you. But by the time he/she leaves you think, "How I wish he/she hadn't come!" Others come and find that, "Oh! This house is so big for you! I bet you're going to be happy here. *Yhu!* You have inherited all these cars!" You know!

Vivie : Are there perhaps other experiences that you think, even if you cannot admit to anyone, they are benefits of widowhood? Things that you don't find oppressive, instead they make you happy. You don't share that with anybody, but keep it to yourself.

Qondi : Vivie, I won't lie. There's a lot of that feeling. I'm going to say this repeatedly, that I've long been a widow. Part of me feels my life has some quietness now. But I have a problem. I love my child very much. Perhaps it's because he's an only child. I have a feeling that the life I lived with his father affected him very, very much. When I think of it now I realize that I'm happy, now that Simon is dead. What I learnt, Vivie, was that he loved his child. But when he wanted to hurt me he would use him. He would do something to him and I'd know it was directed at

me. Let's say Xola is doing something at school and needs to be taken there. He would tell him bluntly, "Why don't you go on foot? Even your mother has nothing here!" And I'd know that it's not that he does not love him, but he knows I won't take it well. So, sometimes I think it's good that he had to be the first to die, so that I can make plans for my child. I sometimes think, as a child, he is not happy, but his life is quiet now that he is dead. The other day he [her husband] sends my child to … to …. I see Xola carrying a bag. This was at the time when we were not speaking to each other, Things were wrong! Wrong! I found that he had sent him to a shebeen!

"Look! Don't send my child to shebeens! I have a right to get you arrested for sending such a small thing to a shebeen!"

He kicked a row, telling me that this is his child. Can you see that? This makes us fight over this child. How do you think this affects the child emotionally? Because he is here, he can see that he is the cause. I was so angry that I thought I'd take the matter further, to the extent of getting the person who sold liquor to minors arrested. Can you see? He is educated, he knows this is wrong. But he is certain that I'm going to react. Can you see that he is using my child as a tool for rejecting me? So I do have a feeling that, [pause] that it is even better. Also, because of the kind of life I lived, I think it's right. It's right. I also think because of our culture, we think divorce is wrong. So when I think about it, I tell myself that we have been parted by death. All that time I was wrecking my health, myself. I think eventually, our divorce came the right way.

Vivie : If you were to be asked for your opinion, not necessarily for yourself, but for

others, what would you like to see continued with or changed in the culture of mourning?

Qondi : I think mourning .... I wish people could understand that mourning is in you, and not what you wear. Because you can wear the black clothes, but go and dance at a party – if it means when in mourning you shouldn't go to parties. People think when you are dressed in these clothes you won't go to certain places. But if a person attaches no value to mourning, is only doing it because she's forced to, she'll go on and do things against the ritual. I think one should be allowed to do it the way she finds suitable for her. I think you [the widow] are still hurting. Nothing would drive you to a party soon after the funeral. I think if I buried [my husband] the previous day, I'm talking about myself, the following day I decide to go to the beach, it should be understood that one does things in a particular way because of the way she thinks; the way she feels. For instance, I ended suppressing my wish to go to the sea, although I wanted to. I really wanted to. I even thought if I could be at a place where nobody knew me, I would fulfill my wish. Do you know that, Vivie, I left here in December, I had decided to take myself out. I desperately wanted to be at a place where nobody would be watching my moves and saying 'this widow is happy'. I wanted to be at a place where I would be seen as a person, and not a widow. But what was painful was that I couldn't tell even my friends because they would think, *"Yho!* She's got money! She's going away. She's leaving those cars behind and flying!"

I was scared of people seeing me at the airport. I ended up taking a bus. My friends, Mr. and Mrs. Nteyi, who knew all about me, who had been of great help

when my husband was ill, only knew a day before I left. I told them only because I wanted them to take me to the bus. I was ashamed of what they would say. Can you understand that these people are my friends, people who would have understood that I needed relief. Like soon after Sai's death, I wanted to go away, not even to Durban where there could be a single person who would identify me. Had I had money, I would have gone overseas where I'd be seen as a human being and not a widow.

Vivie : Is that feeling gone now?

Qondi : It's not gone Vivie. Perhaps it's subsiding because of my culture which dictates that you can't go away. You are supposed to remain around your child's family, this family with all its rituals. There is this belief that if I were to take Xola overseas with me, when it's time for him to go to initiation school there'll be none of his clan there. So I don't think it's gone. I'm suppressing it due to certain reasons. Otherwise I think if I didn't have these people's child, I'd go away.

Vivie : When you went to Durban, did you go with your son or your friends?

Qondi : Initially, we were to go together [with my son]. My aunt had left earlier. She called and asked Xola to join her. So he left almost four days before me. My other friend, Ms Ngcelwane, had left by car. We all met there.

Vivie : This is not your first experience with the death of a husband. You experienced it when you lost your brother. When you look at what you have experienced in your loss and how you treated your sister-in-law, is there a difference?

Qondi : You know, it took me to be a widow to realize certain things. We made those things of making my brother's widow wear the black clothes for six months. Now

it comes back painfully when I realize that the poor child had to go through this. This what we did to her! My family is educated. We didn't want to do it, especially the sisters and brothers-in-law, but we had to observe this culture of ours. My mother was a teacher; my father was also a teacher. Even the guy who had passed away, Phathekile, had mentioned it several times that his wife should never be made to wear black clothes. Blacks believe in carrying out the wishes of the deceased. But we, the surviving relatives of this man, told ourselves that our [extended] family was not educated. How would they feel if we didn't observe our culture? The community, our clan that was not educated, they would regard us as being too westernized. 'Okay, we should do what they expect, or they'll start labeling us as teachers, clerks and whatever! We see ourselves as better than others and are trying to change old family traditions'. So we really did that to please elderly members of our family. When I think of it now, I realize that there must be many, many things that we did which did not make her happy; which I was also not aware of when we did them.

The first thing I've thought about is, if I couldn't bear those clothes for my three-month mourning period, how much more with her and her six –month period? It's only now, Vivie, that I've realized that certain things that we thought made her happy, did not. For instance, I was disappointed when she said …. My father had large stock. My brother decided that for the funeral we would slaughter a cow. Look, he did not even tell her that. She only heard people talking about a truck that was to fetch a cow. We thought that would make her happy. So I was disappointed when she said, "Why didn't you inform me of such a good deed? I

would have told my relatives, especially because you did not have to." I thought, 'He-e!' Can you see how a widow feels? You think you are being kind while in fact you are hurting her.

Vivie : What is your opinion about the fact that widows have to stand up and tell their experiences because it could happen that the treatment they get is not always aimed at settling scores with them? It could be that the people who dictate this culture for them have not experienced widowhood and therefore do not know that they are hurting them. Wouldn't it change the circumstances that violate their rights if they spoke out to make things better for future widows?

Qondi : I think that is very important, Vivie, because sometimes one says something and you think, 'Oh shame! She thinks this is the thing to say!' The reality is that the person is hurting you inside. I think it is important for widows to voice out their feelings. When you are a widow you can't even get excited, you have to contain it. Sometimes even when you are hurt, you shouldn't show it because a person will say, "What's wrong? Are you thinking of your husband?" Anything can hurt you! Sometimes when you become too happy while still wearing these things, people start looking at you, *"Yhu!* You're so happy!" You don't know what exactly you should do. I think widows should say these things so that people can know how a widow feels. Perhaps they are uninformed.

Vivie : Qondi, I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. I know it is not easy to speak about this kind of experience, especially that it is not long since you lost your husband. What is ironical about this interview is that when you first agreed to be interviewed it was because you were boasting about

how well you had treated your brother's wife when he passed away. But now you are speaking as a widow yourself, and you have realized that had you asked your sister-in-law what she wanted , she would have asked for none of the things you thought were good for her. This highlights the fact that sometimes the in-laws are not out to hurt the widow, but they make decisions for her at a very sensitive time in her life.

Qondi : What you are saying, Vivie, reminds me that after my brother's funeral I spent some time at his place. I thought I was doing something good. Even when visiting my parents, I thought I should stay at his place, but now I know it must have appeared as though I wanted to watch his widow, especially because I'm an in-law. I think it was the third weekend after the funeral when my sister-in-law had to attend her brother's farewell function. After the party guests would go to his place for a meal. Let alone that I didn't say anything, but I was somehow offended, thinking, "This person is happy! She has time for parties and things!" Because it's me, I didn't say anything. But inside, what she did made me angry! She can't lock the house and go to a party! Tell me, Vivie, is her brother's farewell function a party? In fact, I was offended earlier that day when she sent one of my brothers to buy Fish Eagle – to give to her brother as a gift. Look, that made me angry! She sends my bothers to buy her expensive liquor soon after losing their brother! She's spending my brother's children's money on liquor called Fish Eagle! Look, I was cross! I'm saying this for the first time, Vivie. I never told anyone about it. I felt like she had destroyed me emotionally. If she could open me up, she would see how I hated what she was doing.

Vivie : But now you see things differently.

Qondi : Very much! That's why I think it is necessary for widows to speak out. Even people in general, could.... Do you know how good it would be if you interviewed somebody who has never had a widow in her family. Just ask what that person's perception of widows is.

Vivie : Thanks for that suggestion. Yesterday you mentioned that you almost cancelled our appointment. Now that we have talked, how do you feel?

Qondi : You know, Vivie, this interview frightened me. I didn't mind when we kept missing each other. I began to relax after we talked yesterday. I also feel. comfortable with you since you're also a widow. Most of the time when I try to deal with my thoughts, I usually think, " Oh! Who'll understand me?" I usually call my brother's wife. But now I feel good. Learning, you know, is a long process. I was asking myself, "What is it that Vivie wants to know about my affairs. What is it that she hasn't heard and wants to know from me?" So I had some discomfort. I still think if it were not you; if it were not for the fact that you're also a widow, I wouldn't have been able to explain in detail what I'm in. For instance, if I were to be interviewed by someone who's not a widow, you'd see what I'm talking about. Perhaps I would respond with an attitude that says, "It's you who do this to us." Perhaps that person would explain to me why the community wouldn't allow me to go to the sea. Why should it be a secret that I was going to Durban? Most of the time I stay here. And I have anger. Look, after I have locked my gates I don't understand when people come here without an appointment. I tell myself, " O-o! He is visiting me discreetly. He doesn't want to

be seen coming here!" I also don't want .... My husband didn't .... Didn't like people. So when people want to do in-and-out of the house I usually think, "Why are they coming here?" Do you get what I'm saying?

Vivie : Qondi, I must thank you again for your time. May I come back if there's anything more I want to ask you?

Qondi: Yes, you may.